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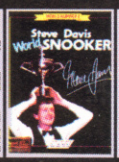

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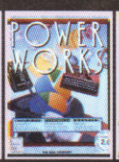

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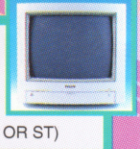

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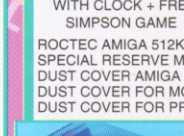

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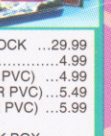

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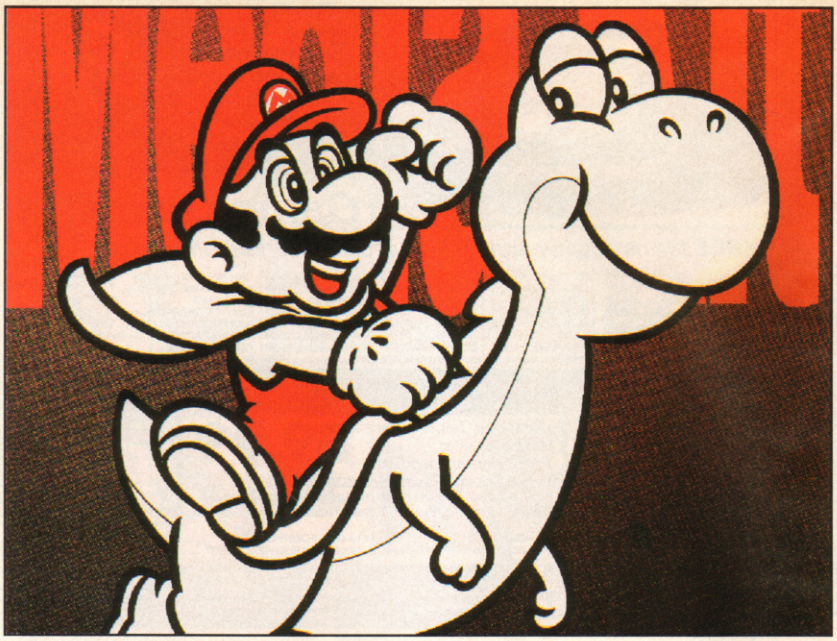
ACE

No.54 MAR 1992

You'd have to be very unobservant *indeed* to have missed the fact that we have a shiny plastic disk stuck to the front of this month's issue. But no-one at all would blame you for making the easy mistake of thinking that we've simply leapt on the magnetic media bandwagon. No, no, no! *Our* disk contains nothing but the finest quality programs for your enjoyment, not the arse-about-face hotchpotch found elsewhere. But then, regular readers will have come to know that ACE is far from your average computer games magazine.

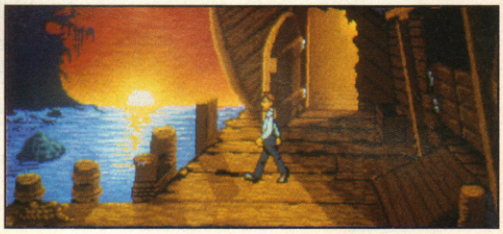
If this is the first time you've read ACE, we'd like to offer you a warm welcome. We're confident that you'll be happy with us and together we can enjoy all the thrills, spills and chills presented by the games world.

We take our games seriously, because we know you do too. That's why we're the only magazine in the WORLD to run six page reviews of the six hottest games *every month.* You'll also find that our News, Previews and In the Works features give you the first and the best information on the hottest games. If quality games are your bag, then ACE is your mag. Now, let's do it.



10 Mario! Mario! Mario! Mario! Mario! Mario! Mario! Mario! Mario! Mario! Mario! Mario! Tune in to our super new-look News section to find out an explosive new revelation about the world's favourite game character, along with hot gaming bulletins from all around the globe.

16 Turn to this page and you'll be treated to Gary Whitta's best selection of Previews in months. Want to find out about ***Hook, Archer Maclean's 3D 8-Ball, Desert Strike, The Tomato Game, Plan 9 From Outer Space*** and ***Dynablaster*** among many others? Then this is, without doubt, THE place to be!



We don't often run competitions, but when this offer came along, we thought it was simply too good to miss. In our ceaseless quest to help you chaps fill your bedrooms with more and more gadgets and electronic wizardry, we're offering you the chance to enter our super phone line competition, with first prize being a compete home entertainment system in the form of a Commodore CDTV and a fantastic Cube TV from Philips. And all you've got to do is pick up the phone... page 74

Editor Jim Douglas. *Deputy Editor* David Upchurch. *Art Editor* Jim Willis. *Designer* Jenny Abrook. *Staff Writer* Gary Whitta. *Contributors* Gary "Stig of the Dump" Penn, Rik Haynes *Photography* Edward Park. *Advertising Manager* Mike Wills. *Advertising Production* Esther Rodd, Remzi Salih. *Pubfighter* Garry Williams. *Subscriptions* PO Box 500, Leicester LE99 0AA. Tel: 0733 898100. *Colour Origination* Pro Print Repro,Barking Road, E13. *Typesetting* Pre-Press Ltd. *Distribution* EMAP Frontline, Park House, 117 Park Road, Peterborough, PE1 2TR. *Printing* Severn Valley Press, Caerphilly. © EMAP Images 1992

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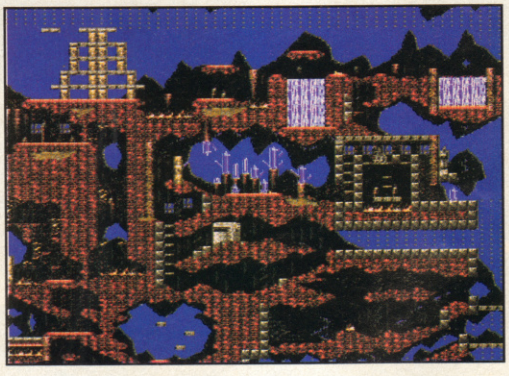
20 Gary Penn, who used to be quite good, turns what's left of his meagre talent to telling us all about a rather spiffing new racing game from Gremlin - on the Super NES. My word!

36 Disney's superlative *The Rocketeer* is just one of the six top products that gets the definitive six-page ACE treatment this month.

42 Oooh! Pretty! This is *Shadowlands* and it's from Domark. It's been programmed by Teque and it has a thing in it called Photoscape. Bet you're intrigued...

76 Are you totally useless? Are your gaming skills rubbish? Never fear, our TNT section will soon have you playing *The First Samurai* and others like an old pro!



7 Disk! - Not only do we give you a disk, but we explain how to use it! **10 News** - A revamped look for our trusty friend. **16 Previews 20 In the Works** - Games Lord Gary Penn checks progress on *Top Gear* & *Parasol Stars*. **29 Screentest** - How all the scores work and stuff. **67 Consoles!** - New releases. **84 Compo** - Win a CDTV and a TV. **82 Reviews Directory** - Quite a read and no mistake!

R E V I E W S

The Best Reviews On The Planet!

30
Space Gun
No-one was as surprised as us when the decision was made to give a straightforward space shoot-'em-up six pages, But we figured it was about time a no-nonsense arcade blast got the full treatment.

36
The Rocketeer
Disney's marginal box office success tries for a more healthy reception on the PC, and gets it! Superb graphics and gameplay alike. *This* is what a movie conversion should look like.

42
Shadowlands
You've played the demo, you've read the In The Works... Now, experience the review! The latest addition toDomark's eclectic product line-up gets a resounding RPG thumbs up.

48
Eco Quest
The planet Earth needs saving - from man! Sierra release the game that we knew was coming sooner or later. Kiddies' adventuring in the name of ecology, anyone?

54
Twilight 2000
In the aftermath of a nuclear war, Poland is in a right old state. And Baron Czarny, slavering lunatic dictator needs to be toppled from power before things get *really* bad. Hmm...

60
Harlequin
They might look like nancy boys on the front of chocolate boxes, but in the right environment these b&w fellas can really kick some butt. Gremlin's welcome return to form.

A320

A·I·R·B·U·S

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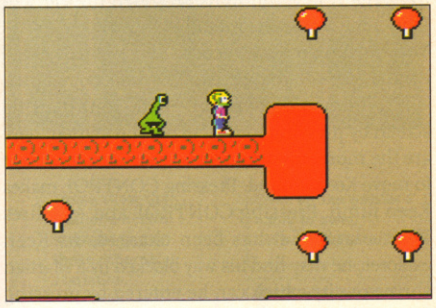
ACE DISK 1

YO!

GET READY TO RAVE WITH MC DiSKi, ACE'S VERY OWN DJ!*



But take care jumping off ledges - Jumpman's only a little fella and he can't stand much of a drop!

* HEY! HEY! HEY! THAT'S DISK JOCKEY TO YOU, MATE!

It's non-heinous! It's happenin'! And it's here! Yes sirree-bob, get ready to rock-a-doodle-doo with the very first ACE Cover Disk! While other magazine cover disks are about as exciting as getting your radio dial stuck on Radio Four during Woman's Hour, ACE's is like picking up the thumpin' funk-filled airwaves of a fly-by-night pirate show transmitting from the back of a stolen transit van, where only the coolest cut and the hottest wax gets airtime.

So what better way to show you what the NEW ORDER (great bunch of guys) is gonna be than by kicking things off with an EXCLUSIVE fully-playable demo level of Domark's Trailblazin' Shadowlands for all you Amiga and ST-owning dudes and dudettes out there AND - can ya believe it? - a bumper pack of four arcade smasheroos for Mr and Mrs IBM PC owner? Am I good to you or what?!?!! Not 'arf!

The Starship Excitement is getting ready for launch! Crank up the volume 'til the speakers crackle! Set colour and brightness levels to the max! FIVE! FOUR! THREE! TWO! ONE! We have LIFT OFF!

ARCADE 4-PACK

Wa-hey-hey! Not one. Not two. Not even three. Yes, you've got FOUR great games to enjoy in this month's superb Arcade 4-Pack. What better way to spend a quiet night in?

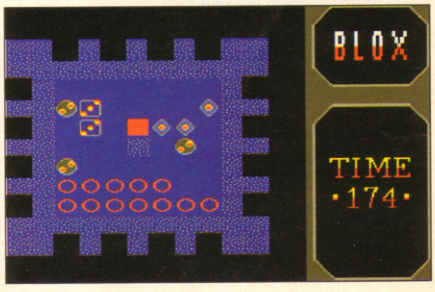
JUMPMAN LIVES!

Jumpman Lives! is a simple-looking but amazingly-addictive Shareware game from Apogee Software. The aim is simple. Our hero, the eponymous Jumpman, has to leap about the platforms collecting the little orange powerballs while avoiding fast and deadly blobs, ponderous robots and all manner of other alien filth. It's a game that requires a fair bit of brain power as well as a lot of dexterity. Use the arrow keys to move Jumpman around and hit the spacebar to make him jump.

BLOX

You can't beat a cracking arcade puzzler - and Blox is a brilliant one. The screen is full of blocks (no!) marked with either one, two or three dots. The aim is to push identical blocks together so that they form a line of three, whereupon they evolve - one-dot blocks become two-dot blocks become three-dot blocks. Get the idea? When you've got three three-dot blocks in a line you've won, and you move on to the next level.

Simple enough, eh? Ah, but you've reckoned without the rings. These are an unwanted by-product of producing a line and gradually fill up the free space. As the room gets tighter, you have no option but to rotate the screen so that they tumble out of the way. Use the arrow keys to move the on-screen cursor and the spacebar to rotate. And don't get too frustrated with it. Remember: At the end of the day it's all a load of blocks.



▶8

ACE DISK 1

INVADERS

The totally rad arcade classic comes to the PC - and in just 4K! No instructions - if you can't work out what you have to do by yourself then you don't deserve to be reading this mag! Use the left and right arrows to move and the spacebar to fire.

COMMANDER KEEN

Yet another superb Shareware game from those Apogee dudes. Commander Keen is one of the most wicked platform games I've seen on the PC. Suck it and see!

While Commander Keen is exploring the planet Mars, the evil Vorticons sabotage his ship by stealing essential parts and hiding them. While the gallant hero remains stranded on the Red Planet the Vorticons intend to destroy the Earth. You must help Keen recover the ship part's and escape Mars so that he can foil their bogus plot.

Full instructions are provided from the title screen by pressing F1. But to get you started, here are the more important keys. Use the arrow keys to move Keen around. Pressing CONTROL makes Keen jump. Pressing CONTROL and ALT fires Keen's laser if it has been charged. As Keen explores, he may find his way blocked by a Martian shrine or city which can be entered by pressing CONTROL.

GETTING GOING...

It's so easy to install your Arcade 4-Pack, even your gran could do it. But just in case you have got Old Mrs Smith seated at the keyboard, here are simple step-by-step instructions...

Put the 3.5" disc in Drive A (or Drive B, if you're lucky enough to have two) and log onto that drive by typing:

A: [Return]

You should now have the 'A>' prompt showing. Decide whether you want to install either to Drive B, C or D. Let's assume you want to install to Drive C. If so, then now type:

INSTALL C: [Return]

Voilá! The games are installed. A menu will appear whereby you can select which game you want to play by pressing the relevant key!

In the future, to get at the games type:

CD ACE_NO1 [Return]

and

MENU [Return]

Have fun! If you have any major loading problems, refer to 'The Troubleshooter' box.

WHOOOPS!

Due to a small error, the Commander Keen game doesn't run from the menu. Sorry! To play the actual game type:

CD ACE_NO1 [Return]

to get into the games directory. Then type:

CD KEEN [Return]

and

KEEN1 [Return]

The game will now run. Once again, our apologies. Next time there'll be no ockc ups, we promise.

THE TROUBLESHOOTER

Uzi 9mm! I am The Troubleshooter. Come with me if you want to load. If the your disk doesn't work then the following may be the problem:

- **The computer is not turned on. Solution: Turn the computer on. (Check all the computer leads are fully connected as well.)**
- **The monitor is not turned on. Solution: Turn the monitor on. (Check all the monitor leads are fully connected as well.)**
- **You are not turned on. Solution: None. This is A Good Thing. Save all that sort of stuff until later when the lights are out. (We'll assume that all your leads are fully connected for now.)**
- **The disk has been obviously damaged in the post or at the newsagents - i.e. it is bent, broken or otherwise rather unfortunate looking. In this case DO NOT INSERT IT IN YOUR DISK DRIVE. ACE Magazine and EMAP Images will not be held responsible for any damage caused to your hardware by damaged disks.**
- **If you've got this far without a solution it looks like you must think the unthinkable - your disk is faulty. Hasta la vista, baby. Shed some of your weak human tears then place the disk in a padded envelope, along with a note explaining your predicament and a 28p-stamped, self-addressed envelope, and mail it to:**

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- **Please note that while we at ACE Magazine make every effort to check the cover disk for all known viruses, we can accept no responsibility for possible damage caused by viruses which may have escaped our attention.**

SHADOWLANDS

Welcome! Welcome to the Shadowlands! Armed only with deft mouse skills and razor-sharp wits you have to guide a party of four brave souls through this specially-crafted mini-level of Domark's superb role-playing extravaganza - EXCLUSIVE to you lucky ACE readers!

On your travels you'll get just a small taster of what the full game is all about. Watch your back for attack from meandering mummies and armoured Amazons. Mind your step as you tip-toe around the bottomless pits and trap-triggering pressure pads. And keep an eye out for secret panels that may reveal incredible treasures - or hideous monsters! A most excellent time is guaranteed for one and all!

If you want the full low-down on the finished game, which boasts fifteen huge levels, a massive bestiary of terrifying miscreants, magic spells, perplexing puzzles and cunning conundrums, then don't forget that there's an amazing SIX-page review of Shadowlands starting on page 42. Without wishing to spoil your reading enjoyment too much, I've gotta tell ya that the game scored a Trailblazing 923 ACE Rating and achieved itself the coveted status of ACE's new Role-Playing Game Benchmark to boot! 'Nuff said - all right?

GETTING GOING...

Entering the Shadowlands is simplicity itself. Turn on your Amiga or Atari ST, bung the disk in the drive and - as if by magic - the demo will load and run all by itself. If you have any problems, have a quick shufty at 'The Troubleshooter' box.

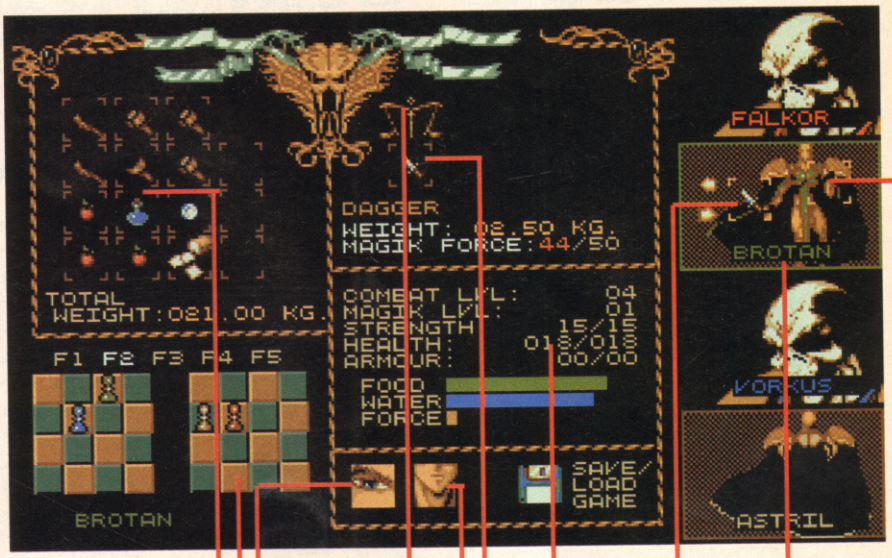
ACE DISK 1

KEYS KEY

Left Mouse Button
Select items or portrait regions.

Right Mouse Button
If clicked when the pointer is in the game window then the view is re-centred around the currently-controlled warrior. If clicked when the pointer is over a portrait then the corresponding inventory screen appears. Click with the right mouse button again to get back to the game.

H	Pauses/unpauses the game.
ESC	Toggles between the two portrait arrangements.



Everyone likes a bit of action now and then, so this will probably be the most popular body part of all, because it's the 'action hand'. Want to put a gold coin in the wall slot? Click on the arrows until the coin appears in the window, select the arm, then click on the slot in the game window. Hey presto! The warrior will walk over and do your bidding. Want to beat up a baddy? Put a weapon in the warrior's hand (or nothing if you want him to use his fists), select the arm, then click on the monster. Other actions are performed in a similar fa-fa-fa-fa-fashion, as David Bowie would say.

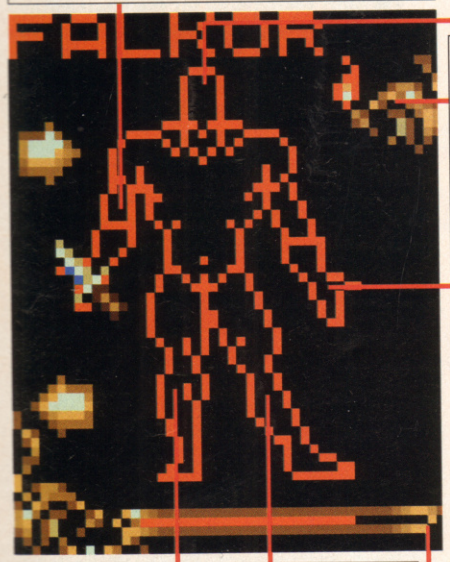
If want to get ahead then you'll need a head. Read signs by selecting this area then clicking on the notice. Nibble on any tasty morsels you come across by doing the same. Most non-heinous.

Used for absorbing magik force from 'normal' items which can be used to recharge spells. Not really used much in this demo, but plays a very important role in the full game.

These show the warrior's health, strength and all those other vital statistics.

Click on the warrior's name to swap between inventories.

In these dangerous times every guy needs protection. Pick up a shield and drop it here to give your warrior some.



A flame flickering here means that the warrior is carrying a lit torch somewhere on his person. To toggle it on or off, click on the arrows near the left arm until the torch is in the window, then click on it and hold the button down for a couple of seconds.

Pick up food and water from the inventory and then drop it here to give your warrior a much-needed square meal.

Pass objects between characters by dropping them into any empty slots in the inventory. Use the arrows to scro!! through the slots until you find a spare one. Remember that this won't work if the two warrior dudes are too far apart.

This is the goody currently in the warrior's grip.

Click here to give the warrior some health-restoring kip. After getting back from an all-nite rave I know how they feel!

Those rad geezers at Teque call this the 'transit hand'. And hey! I don't know what that means either! But what I do know is that this is the hand that makes things happen. Got your eye on a golden goody in the game window? Select the arm then you can pick up the bauble by clicking on it. The object will then appear in your other hand, ready for use. Gear! Use the same procedure to perform other actions, like pulling levers and pushing secret pressure pads.

Each party member is represented by a colour-coded pawn. (Hey! What an ironic comment on the life!) Pick them up and move them about to change the party's marching formation.

I WANNA THROW

If you want to drop or throw an object then select first the 'action' hand and then the 'transit' hand (so that they are both highlighted). Now click on where you want the object to be thrown in the game window. The warrior will comply, but remember that if you ask a weedy wimp to throw an oak chest forty feet away then the chances are that his efforts will fall sadly short!

Clicking here makes the whole party enter 'walk' mode. It works the same as making a lone dude wander, except this time the other warriors follow in formation. You can change formation quickly by hitting function keys 1-5.

Click here and the warrior dude enters 'walk' mode. Guide him around by clicking in the game window. Remember that you can't click where you can't walk, like walls. Totally bitchin' man!

The character's health bar. When you see this going down, you know it's time to get out!

Each little box contains one of the items the adventurer has picked up on his quest. Click on 'em to pick 'em up and then click on an empty box to drop 'em down.

TRANSMISSION ENDS

Whooooooaaaaah! Coming in to land! What a ride - hope you enjoyed it! And this is only the beginning. Next month things are gonna get hotter still. Hey! If you can't stand the heat, get outta the disk drive! This is DJ DiSKi signing off. Hang tough, homeboys!

TO BOLDLY GO...

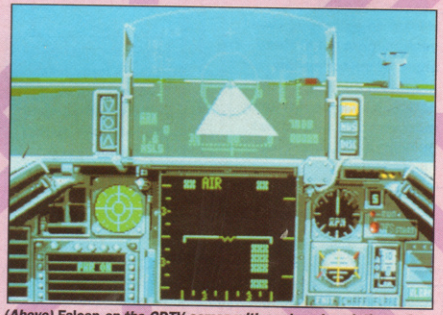
Judging by some frenzied announcements at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas last month, there will be flood of Super NES games to look out for this year. For many players, top of the wanted list could possibly be the release of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Falcon* from simulation specialists Spectrum Holobyte.

In a worldwide *Star Trek* licensing agreement, Paramount Pictures has granted Spectrum Holobyte exclusive rights to create video game software for the Super NES. Meanwhile, Interplay is offering 'Trekkies' a game based around the original TV series on Gameboy, PC and NES.

Spectrum Holobyte is currently receiving rave reviews for *Falcon 3.0* on the PC, regarded by some desktop pilots as the most sophisticated flight simulation to ever hit the home market.

"*Falcon* lets you experience the feeling of sitting in an F-16 pilot's seat," proclaimed a spokesperson, "Dogfight scenarios will challenge you to engage in combat with several MiGs at a time."

These premier cartridge titles from Spectrum Holobyte will be joined by the Gameboy and Super NES adaptions of the arcade puzzler *Wordtris*.



(Above) Falcon *on the CDTV comes with spoken descriptions of the aircraft, flight procedures and missions inside the game.*

(Top Left) Star Trek: 25th Anniversary *is an action adventure on the Gameboy where you assume control of the famous USS Enterprise.*

(Middle left) Interplay and Konami (Ultra Games) planned this Gameboy and NES release to coincide with the launch of the forthcoming Star Trek VI *movie.*

(Middle right) Relive the actions of Spock, Chekov and Sulu as they battle with Klingon and Romulan warriors in Star Trek: 25th Anniversary.

(Left) Keep your eyes peeled for a random 'space alien' in the Gameboy cartridge to win a special prize courtesy of Ultra Games!

THE APPLE GAME

Apple Computer

After months of intense speculation, prominent American computer maker Apple has finally disclosed plans to enter the cut-throat consumer electronics industry. The first of these products, due to be unveiled in the second half of 1992, will be based around low-end Macintosh and CD-ROM technologies.

Apple is apparently going to employ its System 7 and QuickTime operating system software to combine high quality video, sound and animation in a variety of devices, ranging from electronic books and personal organisers to multimedia players and display telephones.

John Sculley, Chief Executive Officer of the Californian company, said he intends to forge closer links with consumer electronics firms and third-party software publishers. Apple already enjoys a successful partnership with Sony.

Last fiscal year, sales of Apple's Macintosh range increased by 60 per cent. New products using Apple-created software technologies will be introduced in 1993.

WORD UP

● Acclaim, one of the biggest video games publishers in the world, has bought Mirrorsoft from the crumbling Maxwell business empire. This is quite a logical step for the firm considering the success Ocean enjoyed over Christmas with games licensed from Acclaim like *WWF Wrestlemania, The Simpsons* and *Terminator 2*. Details concerning the eventual availability of Mirrorsoft and Imageworks games currently in production weren't available as ACE went to press. On the other hand, Virgin Games has secured the rights to the choppertastic *Apocalypse* (previewed in issue 50). Expect to be blasting away jungle fodder in the autumn.

● Start saving now for the latest groovy gadget from consumer electronics giant JVC. The Wonder Mega is a combined Sega Megadrive and Mega-CD in one attractive hi-fi style unit. If this device is successful, fashion conscious British games nuts could have one of these widgets in their hands before the end of the year. What's the downside? Mega-CD software lacks entertainment value at the moment. In fact, the hardware is far out-selling software in Japan. New games for the Mega-CD like *Wing Commander* and *SimEarth* could change this perception later this year.

● KidBits is a revolutionary project designed to give kids with chronic illness or a contagious disease the chance to play computer games. The Children's Hospital in Boston also allows patients to communicate with fiends via a network of personal computers.

● Having trouble getting past the Koopa Paratrooper or finding Yoshi? Do you want totally unbelievable scores? Jeff Rovin and Penguin Books may have the answer to your troubles. Their unofficial guides to Gameboy and Super Mario Bros are sup-

posed to take some of the mystery but none of the challenge out of these immensely popular Nintendo games. Available now for £2.99 each.

● The Thunderboard from Media Vision is a new sound card for the PC. It comes with an FM synthesizer, digital recording and playback capabilities, joystick port, microphone input and power amplifier. PC Connections (0706 222988) sells the Thunderboard, which is fully compatible with AdLib and Soundblaster systems, for £99.

● Namco, one of the most respected arcade video game manufacturers, is constructing a theme park in the Setagaya district of Tokyo. Don't hold your breath for a ticket. This attraction won't open for another four years!

● Ever fancied producing your own dance music? Technoplus is offering a package for Amiga owners which includes everything you require to get things started from this end. The £40 package consists of MIDI interface and *Music X Junior* sequencing software. All you need now is a decent Roland or Korg synth, some original ideas and the contact telephone number... 0604 768711.

● Shekhana Consoles is selling a handy little piece of plastic (£19.99) that enables you to play American Super NES carts on a Japanese Super Famicom. Call 081 340 8565 for further details.

● Looking for a good bargain? Make a note in your diary for the 16-Bit Computer Show at Wembly Exhibition Centre in London (February 14-16), Amiga Expo '92 in Copenhagen (March 20-22) or Spring Computer Shopper at London's Olympia (May 28-31).

● *Ultima - The False Prophet* on the Super NES from FCI and Origin is sure to be a role-playing success. Players are drawn back to the fantasy realm of Britannia to rid the land of pesky critters. The game promises over 100 hours of play and a battery backup to save your current position. This eight-megabit cartridge due for release in the third quarter of 1992.

● Ballistix has converted the *Winter Challenge* sports game over to the Megadrive in time for the Olympics. It costs £34.99 and is out now.

DINO DELIGHTS

Yoshi, Mario's faithful dinosaur pal from the best-selling *Super Mario Bros* series, is on his very own outing for the Gameboy. This new puzzle release follows the tradition of brain teasers *Tetris* and *Dr Mario*.

In *Yoshi*, superstar Mario has his hands full as he matches falling Goombas, Bloobers and Piranha Plants to ensure that his trays stay clean and gains valuable points.

Featuring special 'guest' appearances by many of the favourite cast of characters form the popular *Super Mario Bros* games, *Yoshi* promises to be a fierce challenge. When you need help the most, our green friend will give you a few hints.

"*Yoshi* will challenge players of all ages with this fast-paced, fun and exciting puzzle game," assures a Nintendo spokesman, "Both Gameboy and NES *Yoshi* games are for one or two player head-to-head competition."

THE COLOUR OF MONEY

Yes, it's that time of year when a young player's thoughts turn to the charms of caressing an enhanced Gameboy with a pretty colour screen. Wow! If only it were true, eh?

ACE heard rumours of such an enticing development over two years ago but nothing has ever come of these chinese whispers. Nintendo remains silent on the subject.

If speculation within the trade press is to be believed, a 'Super Gameboy' could be competitively priced against rival Lynx and Gamegear colour systems while retaining the ability to run all existing software for the monochrome model.

Nintendo's Gameboy is currently the most popular handheld video games console in the world. Achieving a hi-score on *Tetris* and *Super Marioland* is possibly the only thing that unites the likes of President Bush, Dannii Minogue and British kids.

There are something like 500,000 Gameboy owners in the UK and eight million over in the United States. In the first half of 1992 alone, Nintendo and its developers plan to add more than 30 new game titles to the existing 150-title library of games available for the Gameboy.

According to Nintendo of America there are more female Gameboy users than male. If these figures are correct, this will be the first time such a phenomenon has occurred since the heady days of Pacman.

"The range of software being developed for the Gameboy appeals to players of all ages and skill levels," purports a spokesperson for Nintendo, "Warranty cards indicate that more than 46 per cent of users are over 18."

Anytime... anyplace... anywhere... that's Nintendo! Is a colour Super Gameboy just around the corner, though?

PLAYING FOR KEEPS

Inspired by the huge success of *Tetris*, *Rampart* takes gamesters back in time to the Middle Ages where they build defensive fortresses and position devastating cannons in a bid to become powerful lords and barons.

It's going to be extremely difficult ignoring *Rampart* in the coming months. Tengen is working on the Sega Megadrive (Genesis) and Gamegear conversions of this popular coin-op while Domark takes care of the Amiga, PC and ST interpretations. There's a real treat in store for Gamegear owners. Due later this year, the portable variation will incorporate an option to link two machines together for competitive head-to-head play. Atari is independently developing *Rampart* for the Lynx.

"Programmed by the same designers who created *720°* and *Paperboy*, *Rampart* combines the best of strategy puzzle games with dynamite action, destruction and explosive graphics," insists a spokesperson for Tengen, "The action is lightening fast and once the onslaught of enemy attackers ends, players must quickly rebuild and extend the walls of their fortress before the next battle begins."

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes of a uncharacteristically quiet year, veteran games powerhouse Ocean managed to sweep the competition away this Christmas by taking top positions in both the full-price and budget charts. Claiming the prestigious prize of overall number one, *WWF Wrestlemania* (Ocean), licensed from Acclaim, again proved the popularity of this cult American sport shown on satellite TV.

Sales across the board, we're very pleased to announce, were brisk and actually up on last year despite the biting recession.

Top titles, in order of our faves, included *Populous 2* (Bullfrog/EA), *Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker* (Virgin Games), *Robocod* (Millennium), *Lotus Turbo Challenge 2* (Gremlin), *Oh No! More Lemmings* (Psygnosis), *Robocop 3* (Ocean), *Microprose Golf*, *Birds of Prey* (Electronic Arts) and, unbelievably, *Terminator 2* (Acclaim/Ocean). Over on the console front, *Sonic the Hedgehog* (Sega) and *Super Mario Bros 3* (Nintendo) unsurprisingly stole the limelight.

What about the hardware, then? It appears discerning punters opted to go for the Megadrive (Sega), Gameboy (Nintendo) and Amiga (Commodore). An honorary mention goes to the PC... at long last!

In the arcades, *Terminator 2* (Midway) ranked supreme, while, after an amazing 44 weeks, *Street Fighter II* (Capcom) remained in the top five. Lucky Super NES players will soon be tucking into a fantastic translation of this enduring beat'em-up. Don't forget ACE was the first magazine in the world to go behind the scenes to see the making of Williams' extraordinary *T2* coin-op (see issue 51 for our exclusive report).

On a sour note, some companies are disagreeing with the findings of the Gallup games chart. A spokesperson for one leading publisher, who asked to remain anonymous, said they were completely disgusted with the 'laughable' chart system currently in operation. Confusion over the appropriate organiser and retail contributors is rife. One thing is for sure. We all need to be unquestionable confident in the charts. Sadly, we cannot say this is the case at present. If you have any opinions on the subject, drop us a line at the usual address.

Nevertheless, ACE would like to congratulate everybody who managed to produce top-sellers in 1991 and thank them for some of the finest games software ever seen. Keep 'em coming!

FOR THE PLAYER WITH EVERYTHING...

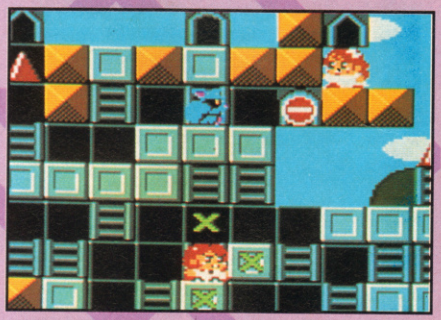
No respectable Gameboy or Gamegear player can be seen without the right accessory these days. Now Euromax (0262 602541) has started to import a range of handy gadgets from Beeshu in Florida.

These sort of widgets are becoming increasingly popular among the new fraternity of video games players out there. Although it must be said that some of them can make your console look and feel rather bulky.

MagniLight (£16.99) is designed to improve the contrast and visibility of the Gameboy by incorporating non-glare lighting to illuminate the entire screen and an adjustable magnifying lens to enlarge small objects in games. It simply clips onto your console and requires one 9V battery to operate.

If your eyes are straining to see the next batch of rings in *Sonic the Hedgehog*, perhaps you should invest in the MagniGear (£11.99)? No batteries are needed for this magnification device which, claims Beeshu, improves contrast and visibility. Oh, don't miss out on *Sonic the Hedgehog*. It's easily the best Game Gear production to date.

Finally, Euromax has something that will really clean up. The console cleaning kit (£5.99) should bring back that pixel perfect gleam to your screen.



BLOCKOUT

Popils, the first Tengen title for the Sega Game Gear, is a colourful arcade game for one- or two-players which should entice younger gamesters.

The object of this release is to solve various puzzles under severe pressure. The Hero knocks out a sequence of building blocks to rescue the Princess who has been kidnapped by the evil sorcerer, Popils. Original storyline, huh? The challenge is to eliminate these blocks in just the right order before the tight time limit expires. This can be achieved by punching, kicking and head-butting your way to freedom.

"*Popils* offers players a new level of video game interactivity," speculates spokeswoman Sherri Snelling.

An internal Map Editor allows players to create their own puzzle designs and the useful battery back-up capability retains the puzzles they have made. Play can be resumed at a later time, even if the power has been turned off.

Tengen aims to launch *Rampart*, *Marble Madness* and *Paperboy* on the Game Gear in

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TRAINS, PLANS AND AMUSEMENT PARKS

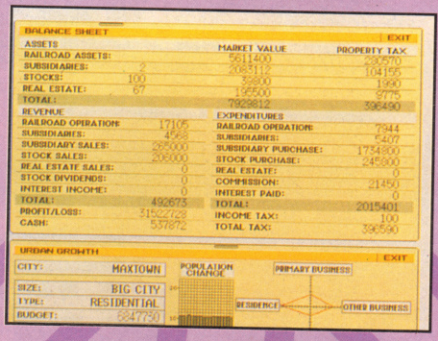
First, Sid Meier at Microprose dabbled with the seemingly impossible dream of constructing and running a railroad bigger and better than British Rail. Maxis, creator of the SimPly brilliant SimCity, is also taking a bold step into the bustling world of locomotion.

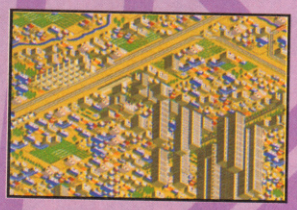
A-Train is the American version of a simulation game originally published in Japan. Over 100,000 copies of the award-winning 'Take the A-Train III' by Artdink have been sold thus far.

In A-Train, you're the owner of a private railroad company. Starting out with rural land, the idea is to lay down track and run any of 19 different freight and passenger trains. These will transport people and building materials to areas under development, feeding the groundwork for housing, jobs and recreational centres that your city needs to grow. You're supposed to invest your wealth into developments like office buildings, factories, apartments, amusement parks, ski resorts, stadiums and golf courses. If you succeed in developing a large city, you may be rewarded with a Bullet Train for high-speed transport. Isn't life great?

"A-Train combines city-building with railroad management and a very sophisticated financial model to provide a depth of play that will keep you challenged for weeks, months or years," guarantees spokeswoman Sally Vandershaf. "In a sense, A-Train is the capitalist's SimCity."

Maxis intends to convert A-Train over to the PC, Windows, Macintosh and Amiga. Ocean distributes SimEarth and SimAnt in Europe while Infogrames has the rights to SimCity.





(Top) Keep track of your investments via the balance sheets. You'll need a sharp eye for nice little earners...

(Above) A-Train: SimCity meets Railroad Tycoon?

PINBALL WIZARDS

Before we all became addicted to shooting alien sprites in the late '70s, many of us could be found noisily smashing the sides of a pinball table in the local cafe.

Thanks to a heavy injection of cutting-edge technology and marketing expertise, a new generation of pinball punters have emerged over the past few years. Popular machines today include cleverly licensed creations based around The Simpsons, Terminator 2, Star Trek, Elvira and The Addams Family.

The Second Annual International Professional Amateur Pinball Association (PAPA) Championship was held in New York earlier this month. PAPA II featured 400 of the best competitive pinball players from the United States, England, Canada and Japan.

This event demonstrates the strength of the current popular revival of pinball. The classic pastime recently celebrated its 60th birthday by recapturing a substantial share of the amusement machine market lost to video games in the eighties.

"There is a solid base of pinball players who keep coming back to the game they loved in their youth," says organiser Steve Epstein, "At the same time, today's pinball is a skill game, with a new generation of innovative computer technology, multi-level play, realistic sound and voice effects and enormous appeal for the new player. And everybody wants to know how good they are."

Williams Bally Midway is the undisputed master of pinball. Hurricane, one of the new games from this Chicago company, is based around a thrilling carnival attraction.

Barry Oursler is one of the most talented and successful pinball designers over the past two decades. His latest and greatest amusement park theme sensation, Hurricane, is the most action packed of the entire Williams' carnival trilogy.

COMING OUT PARTY

Following the initial announcement six months ago, Nintendo has started to talk about its long-awaited CD-ROM accessory for the SNES.

The as yet unnamed but exceptionally competitively-priced accessory will be introduced in the USA and Japan before January 1993. Nintendo has revealed initial production will be 300,000 units per month.

"At a suggested retail price of $200, our new compact disc accessory will launch the next generation of video games," confidently forecasts Minoru Arakawa, Nintendo of America's President.

Super NES compact disc games will use the CD-ROM/XA format licensed from Philips. Unlike the older CD-ROM format, this enables the smooth interleaving of sound, video and data. A system cartridge consists of RAM, ROM and a custom real-time graphics coprocessor for displaying full-screen, full-motion video. The system BIOS includes nine megabits of RAM which should enable the programmers to perform some fancy audio visual trickery. A single compact disc can store the equivalent of nearly 350 ordinary 12-megabit video games cartridges.

Developers and other interested parties are receiving full specifications as you read this and some games are already in production.

Nintendo hopes to additionally create a 'bridge format' allowing SNES-CD software to play on both the Super NES and Philips' CDi (Compact Disc Interactive) hardware, while Sony is said to be in discussions with Nintendo regarding the compatibility of Sony's Play Station CD-ROM system and the Super NES compact disc accessory.

'Together with our worldwide network of Super NES game developers and third-party licensees, we will introduce a full range of outstanding and unique compact disc software,' comments Minoru Arakawa of Nintendo.

Sega is currently enjoying considerable success with the Mega-CD in Japan. As this CD-ROM accessory for the Megadrive incorporates many advanced features it's unlikely that Sega will be able to match the low price of Nintendo's device. If you're thinking of buying a Mega-CD we suggest you wait until they're officially available in this country. Take it from us, the first batch of games really aren't worth the hassle or high import cost.

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Gary Whitta's previews

No time to dally this month, as there's just so much stuff to fit in! Sorry about the rather bizarre positioning of the pages, but the safety inspector visited the ACE offices this month and said that each page was just SO packed with brilliance that to place them adjacently might have led to the skillfulness level reaching critical mass. So they've been specially separated in order to prevent a dangerous explosion of excellence. Alright?

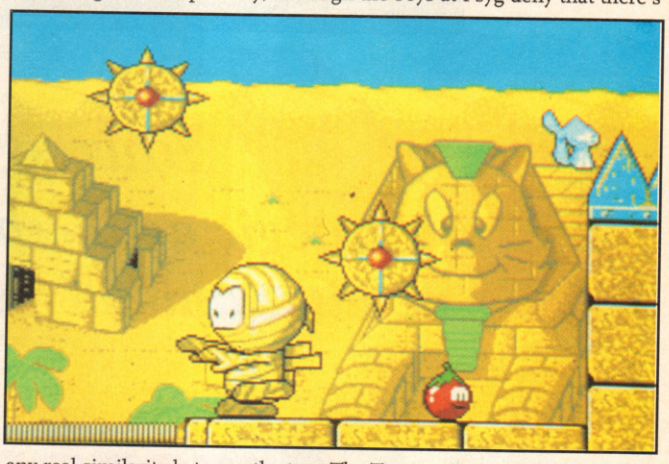
3D 8-BALL *Virgin*

After the mammoth success of Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker, author Archer Maclean is now putting the finishing touches to a psuedo-sequel which promises to be even bigger. Tentatively titled 3D 8-Ball while Virgin comes up with something better, it uses the same graphics engine and control system as Jimmy, but with an all-new American-style Pool table to play on (smaller with wider pockets) and players will get two variations on the great game, with British and American rules. ST and Amiga versions are due out in the Easter, with a PC version promised for shortly after. A Megadrive version is also rumoured to be in the offing, although no-one at Virgin would comment on the subject. But then they wouldn't, would they?

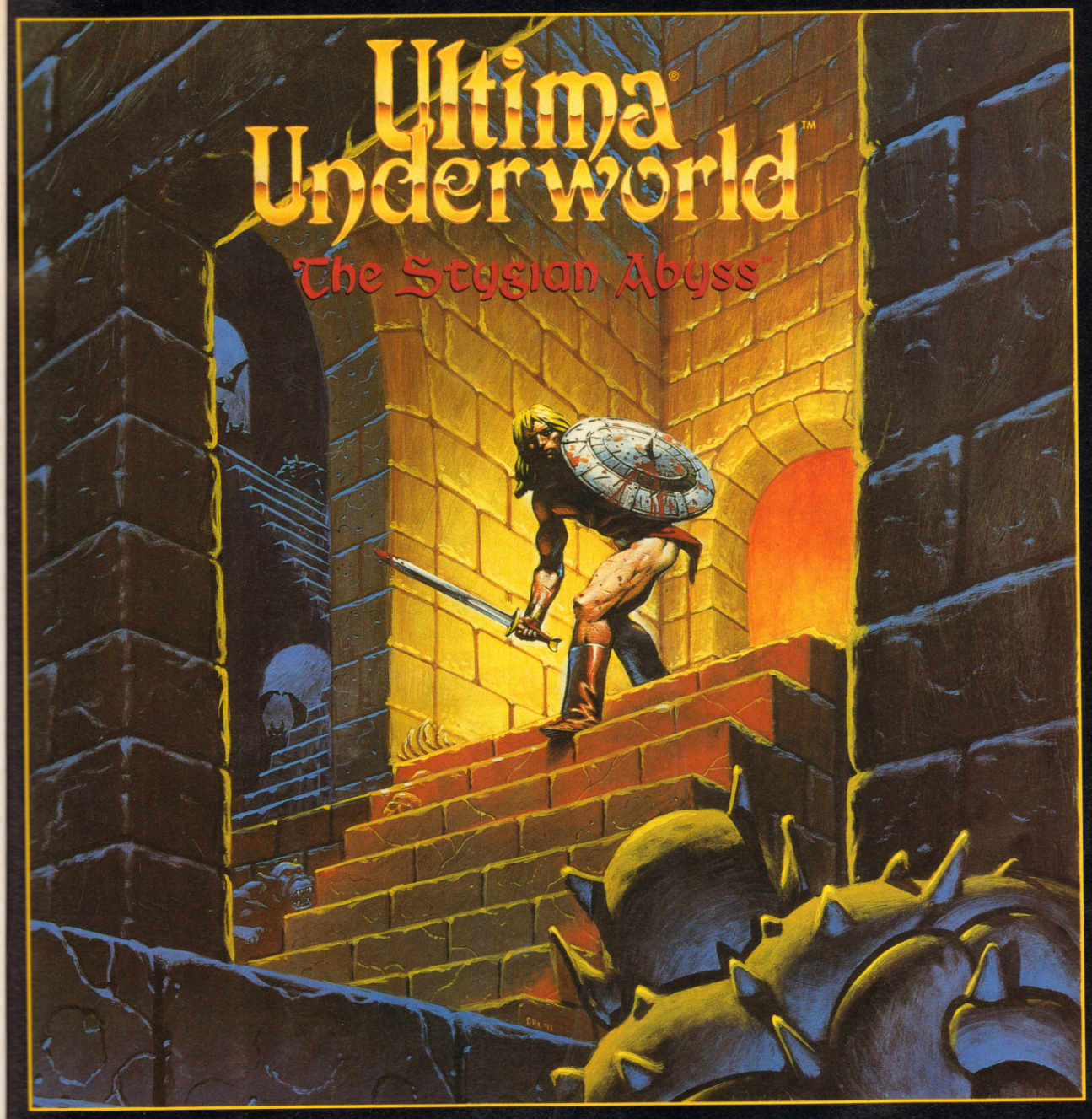
HOOK *Ocean*

Steven Spielberg's radical retelling of the classic Peter Pan tale may not have been quite as successful in the States as was expected, but it's already shaping up to be the movie event of the year over here. Ocean, never one to miss out on a good thing, is currently beavering away on its official adaptation of the $40 million dollar blockbuster, which stars Robin Williams and Dustin Hoffman as Pan and Hook respectively. The game is being written in the Monkey Island mould, with the player exploring Never-neverland, solving puzzles, interacting with characters and all the rest of it. Ocean is making big promises about this one, claiming it's actually better than Monkey Island! The movie's action-packed nature means that we could well be on for some arcade sections as well. Hook, both film and game, is out in the Spring for ST, Amiga and PC.

THE TOMATO GAME *Psygnosis*



Could it be a coincidence that after the success of Lemmings, Psygnosis is now working on another game where the player has to ensure safe passage for a computer-controlled character through a landscape fraught with danger? Well, possibly, although the boys at Psyg deny that there's any real similarity between the two. The Tomato Game is another prong in the Liverpool firm's effort to go "cute" (it's had several sugar-coated projects in the pipeline for a while now) - the game tells of a young tomato who has his sweetheart (another tomato) captured by an evil squirrel. To get her back he must travel to the top of a vine which links different landscapes (jungle, desert, etc) together. Like Lemmings, the player has no direct character control, so he must plant helpful objects around the place, like jack-in-the-boxes and wind machines, that the tomato uses to avoid the myriad of dangers. We have to admit it does sound like fun - it's out on Amiga in the Autumn with other versions possibly following later.



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Some games must be played to be believed and Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss - a game of action, motion and movement - is one of them.

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Actual screens may vary

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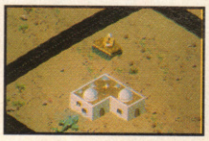
Gary Whitta's previews

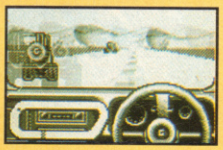
DESERT STRIKE
Electronic Arts

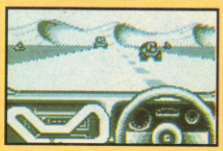
Billed as "Operation Desert Storm in a box", the latest from EA's Megadrive stable makes no bones about the fact that it is almost entirely inspired by last year's Gulf conflict. The story goes that a crazed Middle-Eastern dictator has obtained nuclear capability and is now planning to march his tinpot army across the face of the free world. Now it's up to Uncle Sam, with a little help from a state-of-the-art Apache helicopter gunship, to take the moustachioed maniac down a peg or two. Sound familiar? The game's an innovative mix of shoot'em-up and simulation played out over an eight-way scrolling isometric warzone, with 30 missions ranging from protecting oil fields to POW rescue and taking out SCUD launchers. It all looks jolly impressive, with super-smooth animation and huge explosions - it's due out at the end of March, and there's a full review next month.



DIRTY RACIN'
Gremlin

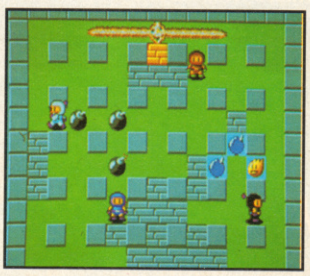
Having enjoyed riotous 16-bit success with the likes of Lotus, Super Cars and Team Suzuki, Gremlin's now making sure that the ever-growing army of handheld owners needn't feel left out with a racy little number for the GameBoy. Dirty Racin' (working title) is an arcade simulation of that most messy of driving activities, offroad buggy racing. It's got all the usual Gremlin-game stuff - tracks around the world, tournament options, a two-player mode, and an impressive 3D update that's expected to send GameBoy owners boggle-eyed. Dirty Racin's already a big hit with the geezers in the Gremlin office and promises to thrill the gamesplaying public in equal amounts when it hits the streets this Autumn. Vrooom!





DYNABLASTER
UbiSoft

What a smashing little game! Anyone lucky enough to have had contact with a PC Engine during its brief spell of unofficial popularity in this country a year or so ago may well remember a supremely addictive cart from Hudson Soft by the name of Bomber Man. Now, Hudson's tied up with UbiSoft, and the result is that Bomber Man is winging its way onto the 16-bits with the new name of DynaBlaster. In the main game a little fella must work his way through a series of scrolling levels, dropping bombs to blow away baddies and fragile wall sections which allow him passage to the exit. As much fun as this is, the real laffs are to be had in the multiplayer battle mode, where up to FIVE players slug it out on a single screen, with the last survivor declared the winner. It's already proved to be a major work-disrupter here at ACE Towers - full review next month.



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER
Domark

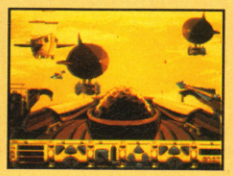
Game genres come and go, but none are quite to perennially popular as the football management simulation. Since the days of the ZX81 they've been firm favourites with gamers young and old - and now Domark is making the bullish claim that it's about to release one that beats the lot. Apparently the two authors spent seven years putting Championship Manager together, which means that in development terms it's at least as old as the classic Football Manager, grandaddy of them all. It promises 1500 players, 80 teams, all manner of tactics, transfers, injuries, boardroom battles and just about everything else the football aficionado could ask for. With its tasty icon system it certainly looks very nice, but how well it will fair against theimminent Player Manager 2 remains to be seen. It's out on ST, Amiga and PC in April.

PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE
Gremlin

We've heard of buying up duff film licences, but buying up the WORST FILM EVER MADE? Surely an act of idiocy? Well, maybe not. It could actually turn out to be a masterpiece of marketing on Gremlin's part, as the whole thing is being sold in very tongue-in-cheek style, and the game isn't afraid to make fun of its rubbishy source of inspiration. Basically, it's an icon-driven adventure that has the player searching a surreal 50's B-movie style world for the six missing reels of the famous movie. Featuring over 50 digitised sequences from the movie, Plan 9 will also come packaged with a free video containing edited highlights. It's out on all formats in the Spring.

STORM MASTER
Silmarils

Hooray for another bout of French fun from our Gallic counterparts. Set on a distant planet ravaged by constant trade disputes and bitter, drawn-out wars, Storm Master promises to mix user-friendly strategy in the style of Utopia and Supremacy with top-level arcade action sequences. Along the way the player, cast as a megolamanic ruler, gets to set up spy networks, bomb and steal from his enemies, wage war, take part in magical ceremonies and... ooh, lots of other luvverly stuff. Graphically it's a dream, but whether it will stand up against the likes of those aforementioned bestsellers remains to be seen. Amiga, PC and ST versions are out at the end of this month.



Look out - he's back!

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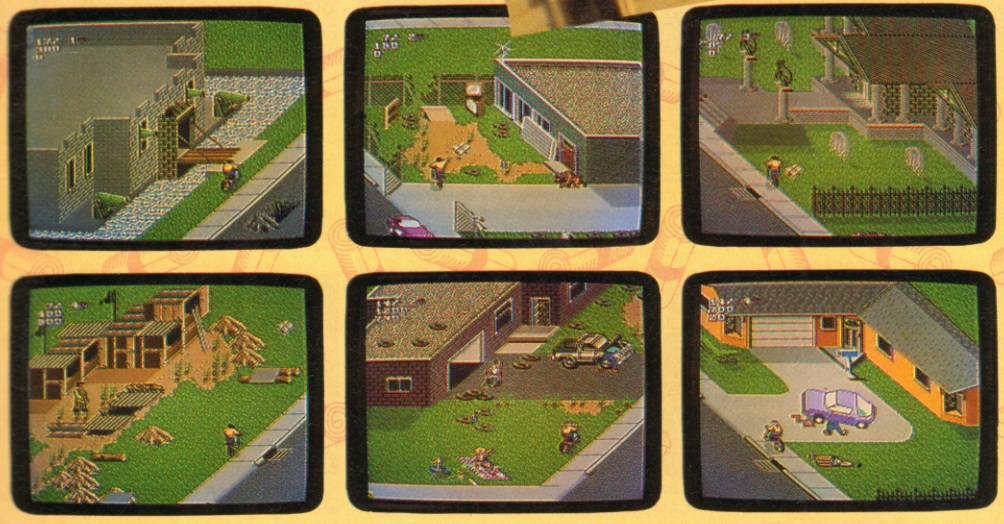

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THINGS THAT MAKE YOU GO "VROOM!"

Tough luck, fashion fans - Top Gear has nothing to do with quality clothing. It is in fact a rip-roaring Super NES racing simulation from Gremlin, a company with more experience in this area of home computer entertainment than most others put together.

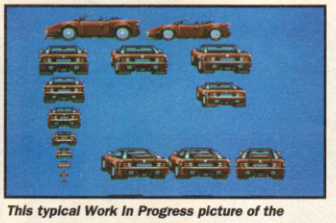
It's a sad but true fact that there are very few decent arcade-style racing simulations available for the home computer systems - or, for that matter, the console formats. But of course, Gremlin intends to change this with the release of its Super NES debut Top Gear.

The slick split-screen racer that is Top Gear has been approximately seven months in the making. The seemingly short development time is down to Gremlin being able to draw on its vast experience in this field. The company learned from the mistakes it made with products such as Combo Racer and Toyota Celica GT Rally and ended up producing two of the best home computer racers around, namely Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge and its sequel.

At first glance Top Gear bears a similarity to the two Lotus licences - but then so do OutRun and most other racing simulations in the same vein. "The similarities are completely coincidental," says Ritchie Brannan, one of the trio of programmers behind Top Gear. "The look and feel is completely different. Top Gear's road moves faster and the corners and hills are more extreme to try to make the game faster and more cartoon like."

Top Gear's cartoon quality is made all the more apparent by the use of comic-strip-like speech bubbles to relate messages to the player. For example, when the car's speed is significantly increased by means of a turbo-boost the driver exclaims "LET'S GO!", and when you fail to finish a course the message "HA! HA! LOSER" or "GAME OVER DUDE" is clear.

Top Gear isn't being put together by Magnetic Fields, the team behind the Lotus simulations. No, this one's in the hands of new coder on the block Ritchie Brannan, who was responsible for the road and sprite routines, and former Commodore 64 coders Simon Blake and Ashley Bennett, who took care of the front end and the car and computer control respectively. Venus: The Flytrap and Switchblade II artist Greggs created Top Gear's look, while Switchblade II music-maker Barry Leach produced the tunes using samples from Hiroyuki Masuno. Bringing up the rear is Chris Harvey who designed Top Gear's 32 different tracks.



This typical Work In Progress picture of the animation frames for one of the cars driven in Top Gear gives you an idea of the level of detail seen during the races.

Here's a picture for all you losers out there... Complete the four tracks in one country to receive a password which allows you to skip to the next.

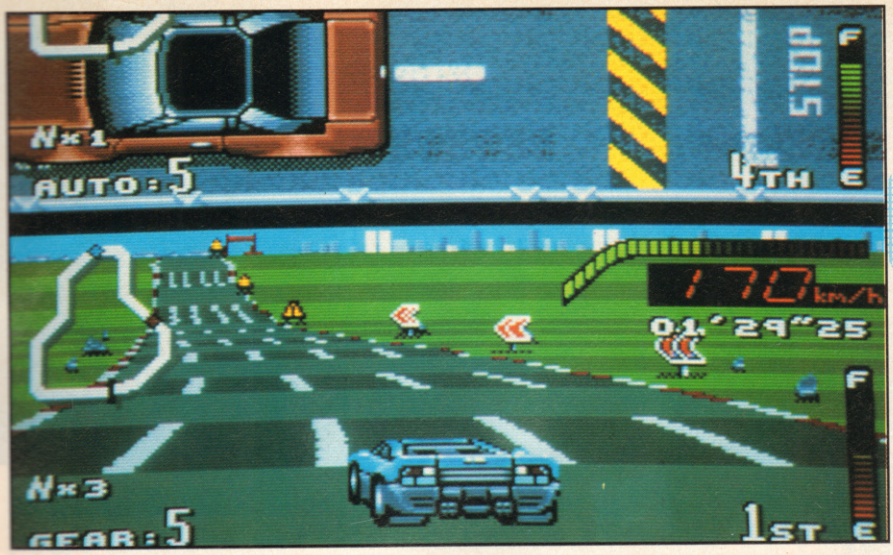
The boys' intent was simply to create a peachy racing simulation for the Super NES - and they feel that they have succeeded, despite not having enough cartridge memory for extra graphics.

"The cartridge is four megabits with some of the graphics compacted," Ritchie reveals. "Top Gear runs at between one and five frames in NTSC - usually on the border between two and three - which puts its average update rate at the same as Lotus on the Amiga in PAL. But the movement in Top Gear is much faster and the road changes more extreme making it seem a lot faster. The view is in 16-colour per character mode and uses all 256 colours."

The Top Gear team doesn't seem particularly concerned by the competition - Nintendo's impressive futuristic racer F-Zero. Well, at least not technically... "F-Zero has some nice touches but is technically very easy to implement requiring only a few precalculated tables and then updating at most eight bytes per frame to create the road."

Surprisingly, the lads had little input from the product's Japanese publisher, Kemco (not

There are four cars to be driven in Top Gear, each one with a different set of performance figures. Take your pick...



(Left) The cars in Top Gear need love too. But don't spend too long in the pits performing petty repairs - you could lose your place as leader of the pack.

(Below) The computer-controlled cars aren't the only problem encountered on the track... successfully speeding through the many tunnels takes nerves of steel.

to be confused with leading coffee manufacturer Kenco, who are shortly to be as famous for their instant as their filter), and few restrictions were imposed. "They basically said that it should be quick and easy to get into and easy to watch," Ritchie reveals.

Ritchie and his colleagues are big fans of the Super NES. "It's a nice machine to work on and, with a few exceptions, very forgiving about asking it to do a bit more than the specifications suggest. It has a palette of 32,768 colours with up to 2,048 colours on screen without splits or filters, instantaneous multiplication built-in, and multi-spec playfields and colour filters. On the downside, the video RAM could have been bigger with more access time, but I believe some cartridge standards exist to enhance this."

The enthusiastic Top Gear guys have little time for the Super NES' critics. "It was billed as the best thing to happen to console games since Pong," Ritchie declares. "Then it came out and a lot of software producers called foul saying it was too slow and generally putting it down. I think they spoke far too soon looking only at a bare spec and a slow processor without taking into account the effects that the correct use of some of the hardware can have on it.

"'Give me a faster processor and I'll do it' is a poor and over-used excuse but always true - dreaming of 50 MHz 68000s is not going to get anyone very far. Speed always seems a problem at first but it can be worked around. Top Gear is playable but only touches on what the machine can really do. We have learned the machine now and the next game should blow your socks off!"

There are 32 tracks to tackle in Top Gear and these are spread evenly through eight countries, each with distinctly different scenery. Here we are right at the back of the starting grid in a hot and sweaty sandy clime.

There are four different control methods available, each one offering a unique arrangement of buttons to activate the car's functions.

Ritchie's next project is in fact another racing simulation: "I'm working on a road routine with more than twice the depth of Top Gear and a much smoother feel. This is in various guises for a Nigel Mansell Formula 1 simulation, Top Gear II or potentially a completely different game with details yet to be decided."

Simon on the other hand is working on a conversion of Gremlin's critically-acclaimed planet management simulation Utopia, and Ashley's finishing Hero Quest on the NES before taking on Nigel Mansell for the Super NES.

In the meantime, you can expect to see Top Gear in the shops in March of this year (to coincide with the Super NES' release in the UK).

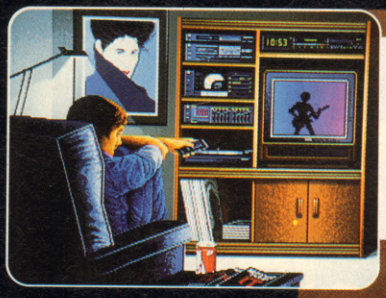
Gary Penn

(Above) To inject a little humour into the proceedings, memory-efficient speech bubbles are used instead of sampled words to convey context-sensitive messages to the player. As you can see here, the driver exclaims "LET'S GO!" when the turbo-boost is activated. Other chucklesome expressions include "WATCH OUT!", "KISS MY ASS!!" and "YO BUTT HEAD!!".

(Below) When the dark of night descends don't dazzle - dip your headlights.

Ultima VI

The False Prophet



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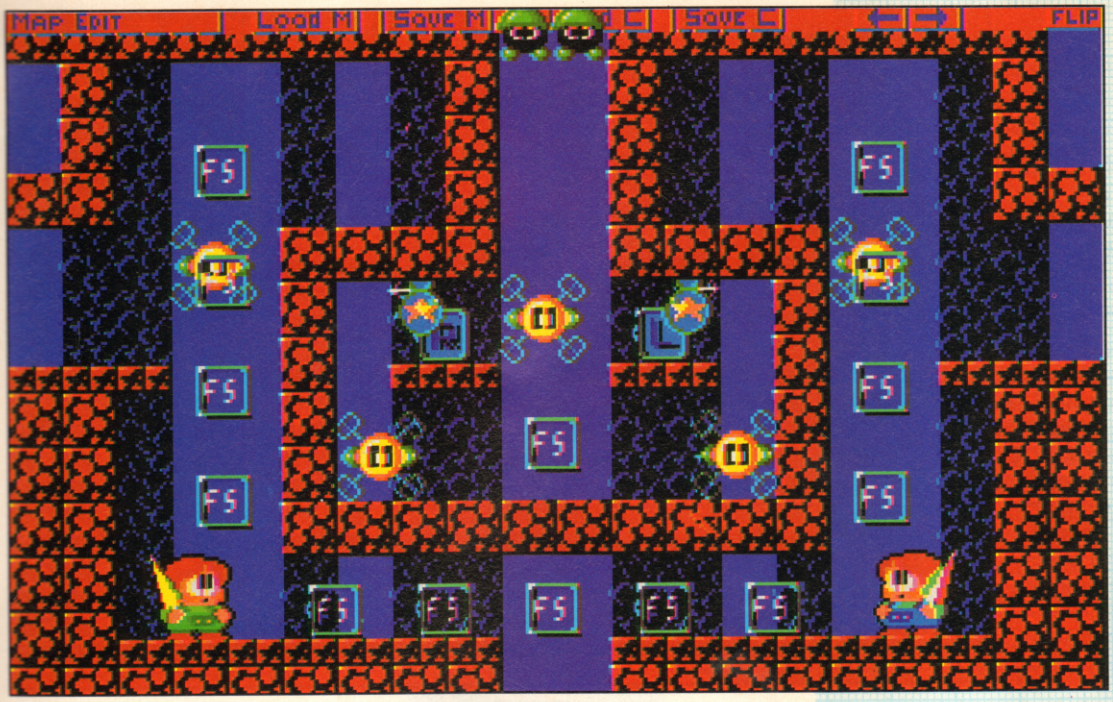


(Left) A typically oh-so-happy scene from Parasol Stars. An 'FS' in a white-outlined box represents a Food Space - a trigger point for food to appear when either Bub or Bob throws somethings across the position in question.

(Below) The title screen. All together now - "Aaaaaaah"!

BROLLY GOOD SHOW!

The boys are back in town - and how! Having bubbled and bobbled and sung a rainbow too, Bub and Bob are now at home to Auntie Ella in Parasol Stars: Bubble Bobble III. Who are they and what's it all about? Read on...

Bub and Bob could hardly be considered the best-known names in the world of computer and console entertainment, and yet to the cognoscenti they rank alongside such bankable stars as Mario, MegaMan, Simon out of *Castlevania*, Link out of *Zelda*, Alex Kidd, new face in the place Sonic, and Dizzy.

Bub and Bob made their debut in *Bubble Bobble*, released by Taito into the arcades way back in 1986. Two years later they hit the home computers thanks to development team Software Creations and publisher Firebird.

The tale took a turn in 1988 with *Rainbow Islands*, also released into the arcades by Taito. Graftgold's home computer conversions would have made it to the stores in 1989 via Firebird were it not for the company's demise. Fortunately, the 8-bit and 16-bit versions eventually made it to the stores after being snapped up by Ocean. And it's Ocean which also has the licence to convert Parasol Stars. (Incidentally, *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands* for the Amiga and Atari ST are compiled on Ocean's *Rainbow Collection* alongside another cute conversion, *New Zealand Story*.)

The *Bubble Bobble* story has thus far been a pretty peculiar one. Parasol Stars is the craziest, most chipper chapter yet.

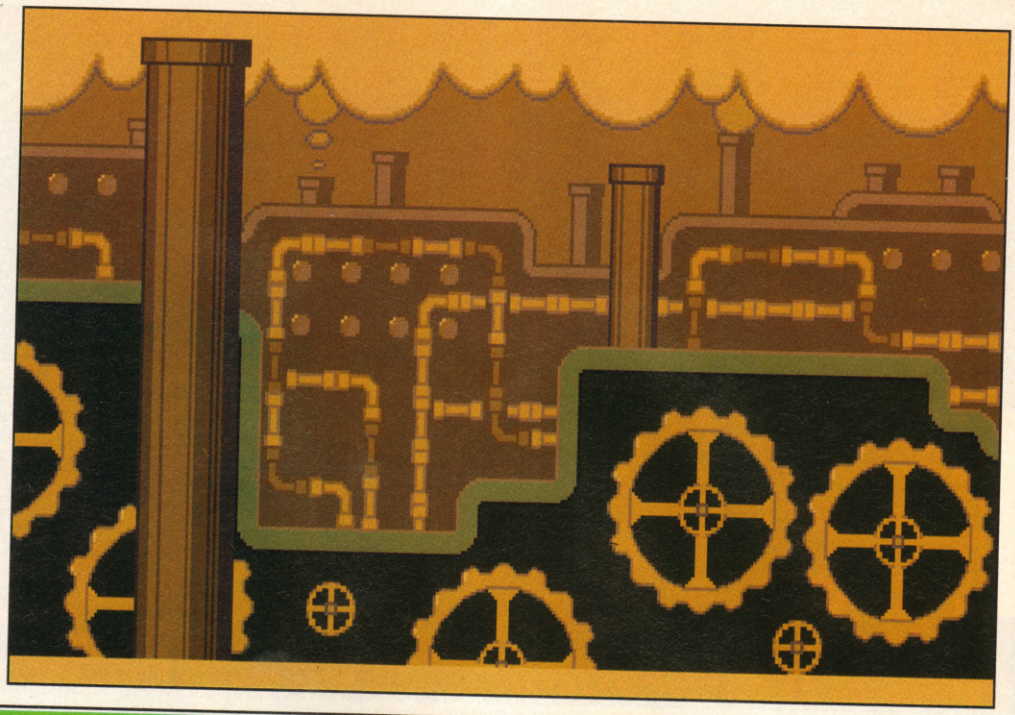
Having defeated Baron von Blubba in *Bubble Bobble* and saved the Rainbow Islands from the Prince Of Darkness, Bub and Bob decided to take a break. But their bliss was short-lived... evil once again pervades the universe and only the dynamic duo, armed with their amazing magic parasols, can save it from a fate worse than Melissa.

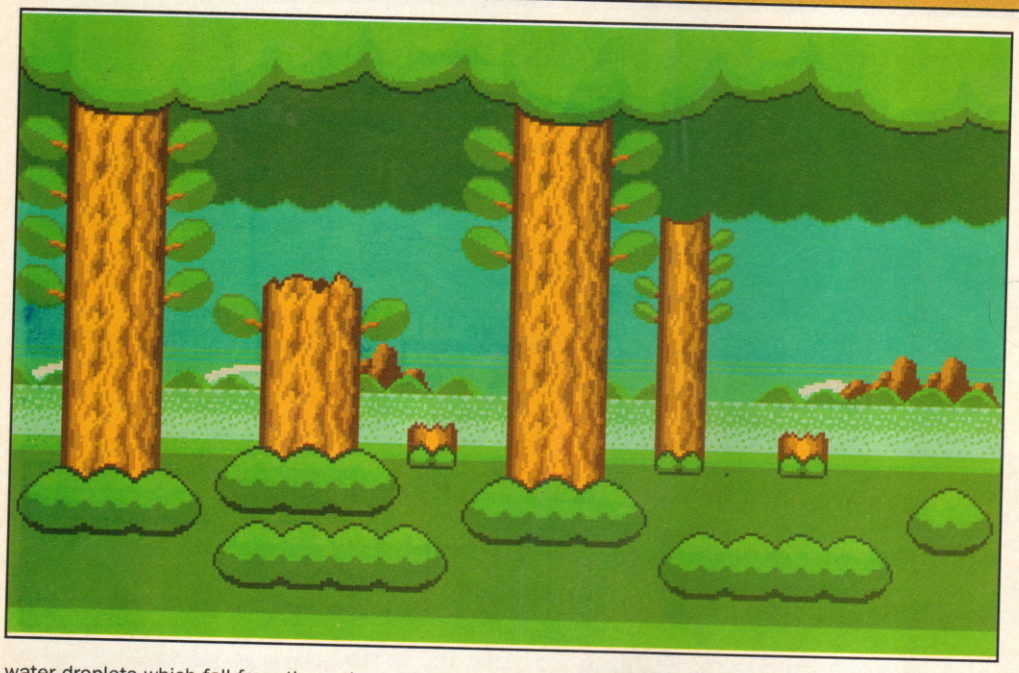
Despite its massive success in Japanese arcades, Parasol Stars suffered the same fate as its predecessors when they were released on these shores: it failed to make an impact. Still, rumour has it that the same Taito team behind the first three chapters is currently working on a fourth.

Parasol Stars is best described as a bonzer blend of *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands* with a liberal sprinkling of neat new features for good measure. It represents a class continuation of the story, combining with swish Swiss precision the precise play elements which made its predecessors tick with enough innovations to give it Swatch-like individuality.

The action offers simultaneous two-player possibilities in much the same way as *Bubble Bobble* does (in *Rainbow Islands* Bub and Bob play in an 'old-fashioned' alternating way). In Parasol Stars, Bub and Bob can work as a team or, better still, fight for the right to party by throwing each other around the screen.

A strong characteristic of the *Bubble Bobble* series is the versatility of the lead players' abilities. In *Bubble Bobble*, the duo's bubble blowing skill was used not only as a weapon to dispose of adversaries, it also proved its worth as a tool for negotiating otherwise impossible to reach areas and earning bonus points. The rainbows in *Rainbow* ▶24





The distinctive scenery seen behind each level is constructed separately from the other visual elements. The platform arrangements are then bolted on top. Seen here are the backdrops for Machine World and The Woodland.

▶23 *Islands* proved even more flexible, with the added abilities of extended reach, and making traps and stairways to heaven. In Parasol Stars, the boys' brollies also provide a wealth of opportunity.

The parasols' most mundane function is keeping beasts at bay. The real fun has begun when an adversary is impaled on the end of the parasol where it spins, stunned, until it's thrown across the screen, either to its death on the floor or into another creature to kill them both for bonus points.

That's one way of removing ruffians from the scene. A more entertaining alternative is to use the end of the brolly to collect water droplets which fall from the top of the screen. A large water droplet is eventually formed, its contents primed to be sent cascading down the level's platforms, taking with it any adversary unlucky enough to get in its way.

As with *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*, there are plenty of interesting weapons and special effects to activate along the way, such as lightning bolts and exploding stars. Most of the special items seem to appear at random, but that's not actually the case - each one makes itself known for a reason, and it's up to the player to discover why.

The first conversion of Parasol Stars to a home machine appeared half-way through 1991 on the PC Engine console. It's from this arcade-accurate version that Ocean is producing the conversions for the Ocean Amiga, Atari ST and Super NES. The task of reproducing Parasol Stars' distinctive look and feel on the new formats is in the capables of programmer Mick West, artist Don McDermot and musician Jonathan Dunn.

The team had little help from Taito. "They only gave us disk with the graphics," Mick explains. "There was no documentation so we had to play it to work out what does what and how the baddies move. It's a very complicated game. There are lots of things in it. I played right through for about two weeks solid, and then went back to it here and there when I needed to find out about certain bits."

Mick's been around a bit when it comes to coding. His track record includes *Steve Davis Snooker* for CDS, *ROTOX* for Creative Materials, *UN Squadron* for Tiertex, and more recently *Darkman* for Ocean, all on the Amiga and Atari ST. Nothing outstanding there, granted, but it's fair to say that Parasol Stars is shaping up very nicely indeed.

Don on the other hand is loathe to reveal the content of his portfolio to date. He is prepared to admit however that "about 50 per cent of the graphics provided by Taito were used - the rest had to put together from scratch. It's pretty much identical to the PC engine version - well, as much as it could be."

Mick wrote an editor utility for Don to make the process of putting together the levels a little easier. "They're built up in a block format and then I can mark on the starting points for the baddies and drips and where the fruits spring up."

The process of conversion began on the Amiga six months ago, and it should be finished for playtesting by the time you read this. The Atari ST version isn't far behind, and then it's on to the Super NES which promises to be enhanced "wherever possible".

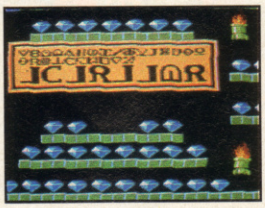
The result of Mick and Don's labour is a silky smooth 32-colour

THE STORIES SO FAR...

Reprinted here for your delectation and delight are the official storylines to the Bub and Bob trilogy.

CHAPTER ONE:

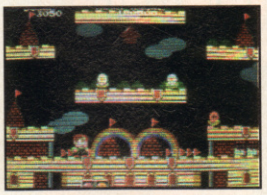
THE BUBBLE BOBBLE BLURB



"Meet Bub and Bob our bantam-weight brontosaures who are bent on battling big bullies by blowing and bursting bubbles. Before battling these brazen bullies, beware that bubble blowing is better than blasting bullies with bazookas, or better than bouncing bombs from biplanes, and even beats boxing these brainless barbarians. So now that we briefly belayed the Bub and Bob biographies, begin by browsing the play instructions below and becoming the best Bubble Bobble bubble blower on the block."

CHAPTER TWO:

THE COLOURFUL RAINBOW ISLANDS QUEST



"Digest on the previous game, Bubble Bobble.

"Bubble and Bobble, who were turned into 'Bubble Dragons' by a wizard, went into the cave of a witch seeking their sweethearts, Betty and Patty. After a long battle and finally getting 'Super Drunk', they could not believe their eyes when they saw their Mom and Dad.

"'Dad! And Mom!...'

"Big tears were coming out of Mom and Dad's eyes. Bub and Bob were so happy after saving them, not only Patty and Betty, but also their Mom and Dad. All of a sudden, they were back to normal again.

"'God, thank you...'

"But they were not completely satisfied until they found the real enemy, who turned their parents into 'Super Drunk' and controlled their minds. There is a real enemy still hiding and waiting for Bob and Bub. They knew that sooner or later they had to face him.

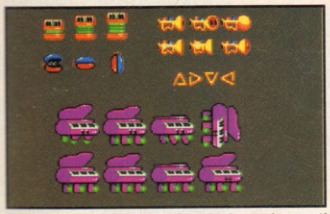
"Many years have passed. Bubby and Bobby grew up to be fine boys with power of 'Magic Rainbows' given by Mom and Dad. When they went back to their birthplace to search for treasures, they became involved in a mystery. They went to look for the real enemy, 'Prince Of Darkness'. He has a large following who are in Bubby and Bobby's way. The final day to face the Prince Of Darkness came. Why don't you play the game to find out? The secrets are waiting to be discovered. There are many puzzles you can challenge! Who will be the real winner?"

CHAPTER THREE:

THE PARASOL STARS

"After saving the villages of Rainbow Islands in their previous adventure, our two heroes, Bub and Bob, are enjoying a well-earned rest.

"However their peace is shattered when the mad warrior Chaostikahn unleashes a flew of menacing monsters throughout the universe. With their magic parasols in hand (gifts from the grateful Rainbow Islands villagers), Bub and Bob must defeat the monsters and free the universe."



(Above and right) Parasol Stars' adversaries are the weirdest and most wonderful Bub and Bob have encountered yet. Seen here are the inhabitants of Musical World, The Woodland and Giant World. Can you tell from which world each character comes?

Amiga incarnation and a no less impressive 16-colour Atari ST version. "The Amiga version runs at a pretty fast speed," Mick proudly declares. "The main parts, like Bub's movement, run at 50 frames, and the less important parts, like the drips and baddies, run at 25 frames because they move quite slowly anyway."

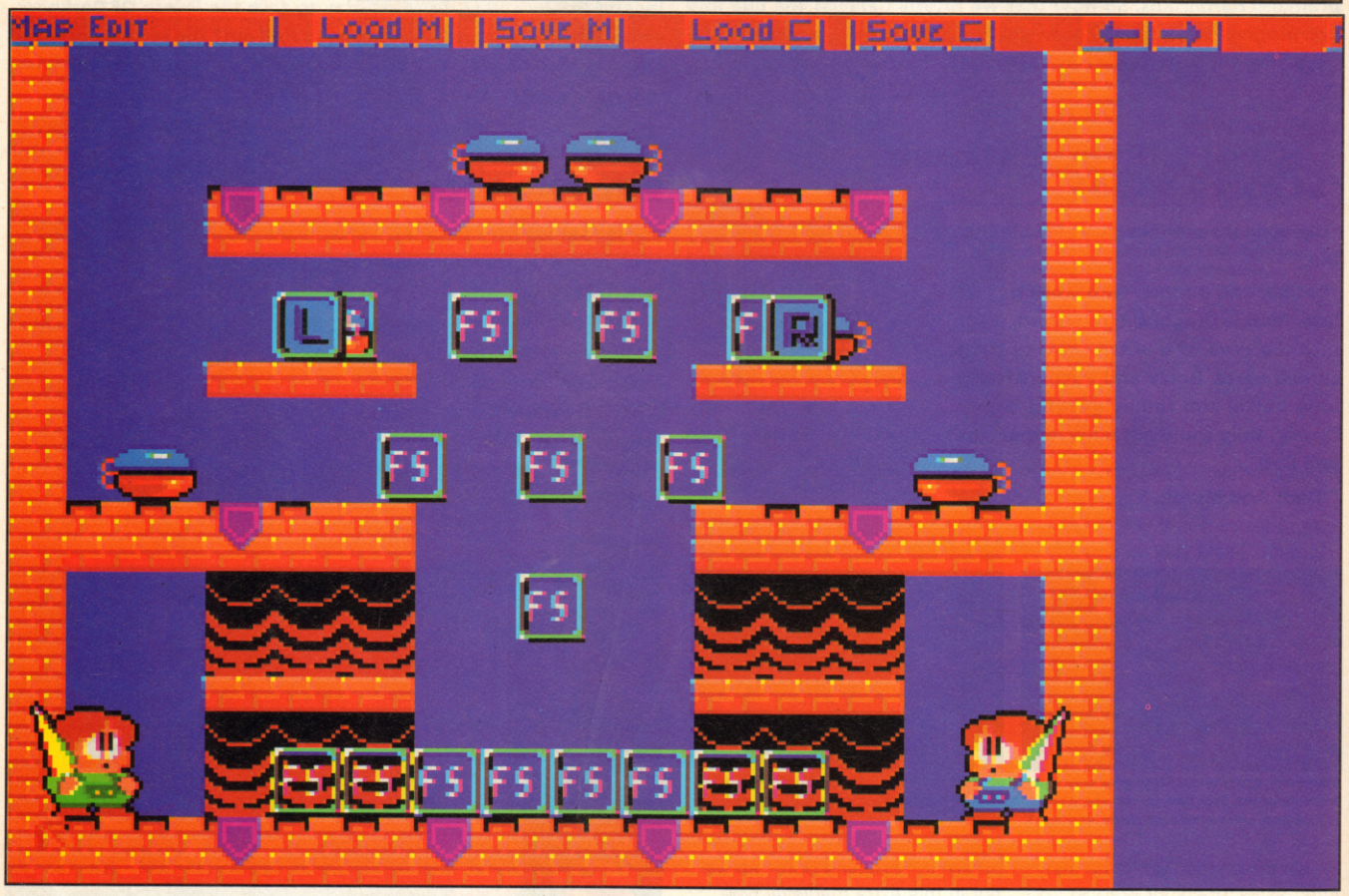
The PC Engine version of Parasol Stars has eight worlds plus two secret ones. These conversions however have a brand new secret world. "We wanted to do something different," explains Don, "so we put in this extra medieval type world, with wizard types, bouncing blobs, cannons, demons with forks, and a giant who comes in parts. It's in the style of the rest of the game. It was hard to copy it exactly - I'm not used to doing cute game - but the new world's not totally alien. If we'd have had more time we'd have liked to have put another world in."

Each world comprises seven levels. The levels are either one or two screens wide, the view scrolling left and right when necessary. The first stop is Music World. Its inhabitants trumpets, pianos, accordions and triangles, and there's a killer one man band at the world's end. The Woodland's next, complete with tree stumps, loopy lions, unicorns reminiscent of My Little Ponies, and a big bizarre bird.

Water World features penguins, octopi, walruses, crabs and a giant reptilian creature which looks like the mythical kraken. Machine World is full of robots (no surprises there, although the beefy Transformer-type robot isn't what it seems), while Gambling World is home to slot machines and chess pieces.

Flying saucers and helicopters are two of the adversaries encountered in Cloud World, and then it's on to Giant World to

▶26



▶25 tackle large ogres, dragons, pink nappy-wearing elephants and a big boomerang-throwing being. It doesn't take a genius to guess what the population of Rainbow World and Bubble Bobble World look like. The *Bubble Bobble* characters finally make an unwelcome reappearance in a mutated form in Hell.

With Parasol Stars being possibly the most involved chapter in the *Bubble Bobble* story and given the non-availability of any detailed material as to the workings of its mechanics, is it possible that the lads have missed anything out?

"Yeah, I probably have," Mick concedes. "There are lots of very obscure pick ups - stuff like 10 points for every jump and the screen flashing as a warning that something's going to appear - and it was difficult to tell what most of them did at first. There were two out of the 60-odd that didn't seem to do anything, so we couldn't use them."

(Top and Left) Those super secret special items in full. Will you be able to solve the riddle of how they can be made to appear?

(Bottom Left) This set of animation frames for Bub serves to show his broily-battling versatility. Impressive, isn't it?

Mick has no idea what he's going to be working on once the Super NES version of Parasol Stars is out of the way, although apparently "Don's got some interesting ideas".

And what of Parasol Stars' predecessors? Does Mick feel that they could have been done better? "Yeah. You could've used 32 colours on the Amiga for better detail in the backgrounds and made the main character and the scrolling move smoother. I'd liked to have had a go at converting them, but obviously it's too late. There seems to be a lot more in Parasol Stars than in *Rainbow Islands* - bigger sprites and more background - but we've managed to get it on one disk."

● **Gary Penn**

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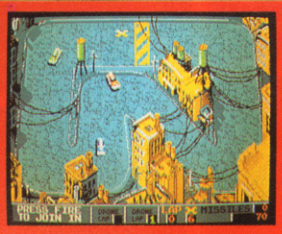

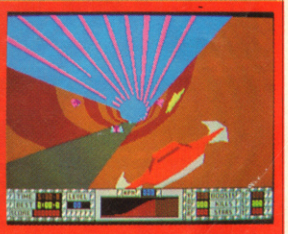

...century when the out-of-the-... Weeds delivering (the Crown ... Mutant Virus Strains – that sort ... there's only one person for the ...

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...addictive, arcade quality action". GAMES X

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"A first rate racing game well worth getting your hands on"
AMIGA COMPUTING

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A ruthless sport has evolved in the Badlands – Sprint Racing with weapons. Customise your hot-rod car with high-velocity missiles, speed, tyres and shields. It's all out war on the tracks; ruthless, destructive and fun for one or two players.

"Recommended without any hesitation". C & VG

"Frustrating, addictive, exciting, challenging, it will turn best friends into archenemies". COMMODORE FORMAT

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Grasp the controls and enter the awesome three dimensional world of the Stun Runner – experience thr thrill of racing at speeds of over 900 miles per hour in your armoured bobsled through the futuristic tunnels of the Stun network. Jump the ramps, annihilate the opposition with shock waves and follow the trails of bonus stars through to "The Ultimate Challenge".

"A good conversion of the coin-op's essential elements" COMMODORE FORMAT

"Good samples and fun futuristic theme" AMIGA FORMAT

DOMARK

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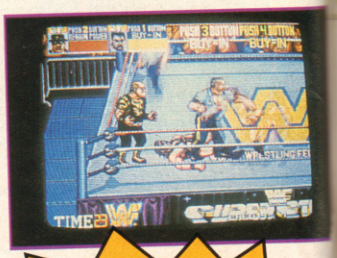

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SCREENTEST

Stop, stop STOP! Don't turn that page! You're about to enter the Screentest section, a highly complex and thrill-packed environment, and you'll only get the best out of the next batch of pages if you know how to find your way around. So why don't you invest a few minutes reading through this guide, and fully versing yourself in the ins and outs of the ACE Screentest system? Not only will you come out the other end a more rounded person, but you'll know what all the little logos mean as well. So, without further ado let's get down to it and let's do it.

COMPARE ANDCONTRAST As an easy frame of reference, every game is compared to either another in the same genre, or maybe it's original coin-op or movie form.

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THUMBS UP & DOWN The most important positive and negative points in at-a-glance format. Maybe it's too tough, or lacks a two-player option etc.

RATING A score out of 1,000 - the most instant guage of a game's quality, further qualified with scores out of 10 for Graphics, Intelligence needed to enjoy the game, Audio and Fun factors.

PIC CURVE A prediction of the lifespan of the game's interest. An arcade blast may have lots of instant appeal, but will you still be playing in a month's time?

HINT Found on the centre pages of most reviews denoting - surprisingly enough - the location of a handy start-up tip.

TRAILBLAZER Awarded to games of outstanding all round quality, and generally viewed to further the art of games software production. A game bearing the Trailblazer logo should be bought without hesitation.

SOUND, GRAPHICS AND IDEA These awards go to games excelling in a particular area. A game which fails to get a Trailblazer for rounded fabness may still walk away with one of these.

HARLEQUIN

TWILIGHT 2000

ACE BENCHMARKS

A Benchmark game is, in our opinion, the very best in its particular Genre. By glancing at our description of the Benchmark, you will be able to decide if particular differences in a new game's design would make the current Benchmark or the new contender more or less appealing to you. Also, no software collection is complete unless it contains all the games listed here. If you're missing any, go and remedy the situation immediately.

ARCADE BLAST
SWIV (Storm)

Silkworm's follow-up succeeds through a combination of frenetic speed, polished presentation and sheer, unadulterated action. The firepower and wastage on screen is absolutely incredible. A coin-op in your own home!

ARCADE ADVENTURE
GODS (Renegade)

Not as intrinsically sophisticated as the likes of *Rick Dangerous* or *Prince of Persia* the Bitmaps' platform opus does offer enough fully-rounded arcade action to make it this category's outright winner.

ROLE PLAYING GAME
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER 2 (US Gold/SSI)

Even bigger and better than the original *Beholder*. Although basically more of the same, there's still an incredible amount of exploration and the flexibility of the friendly system makes it a winner.

SPORTS ARCADE
KICK OFF 2 (Anco)

The primary reasons for Kick Off 2 being so playable are the ultra-instinctive control method and the remarkable speed. Not only is it the best soccer simulation ever, but one of the most enjoyable games of all time.

STRATEGY
CIVILIZATION (Microprose)

This awesome strategy epic has the player leading a race of people through technological and cultural expansion as civilisation develops through the ages. Heavyweight stuff, but the work of a genius.

ADVENTURE
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND 2 (US Gold/Lucasfilm)

Guy Threepwood returns in the latest SCUMM™ adventure from those ker-razy Kalifornian kooksters at Lucasfilm. A treat on the visual and audio fronts, and guaranteed laugh-a-minute rollercoaster of pun-tastic fun.

RACING SIMULATION
FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX (Microprose)

It's almost impossible to find fault in this awesome game from Geoff Crammond. Packed with help for novice drivers and detail for experienced racers, it'll keep you driving in polygons for years.

BEAT'-EM-UP
IK+ (System 3)

An upgraded and enhanced version of the original System 3 classic, Archer Macleans IK+ is still unchallenged in its field after three years. Its most innovative aspect is the addition of a third computer controlled fighter. Incredibly speed.

RACING GAME
STUNT CAR RACER (Microstyle)

Polygon power and arcade speed thrills mix in this novel race jaunt. Race around elevated raceways, smashing and crashing your opponent into oblivion. Growling audio and a weird-look novelty too.

SPORTS SIMULATION
JIMMY WHITE'S WHIRLWIND SNOOKER (Virgin)

Tremendous 3D combines with authentic play and amazing realism to make this the Sports Sim benchmark. Virtually beyond criticism, the game boasts the utmost accuracy and easy beginner's tutorial.

SIMULATION
FALCON 3.0 (Spectrum Holobyte)

Quite possibly the best flying game ever written. Falcon 3.0 has more detail than anything you've seen in your life and the friendliest use interface and manual to guide even new players through its vast complexity.

ACTION STRATEGY
POPULOUS 2 (Electronic Arts)

Bigger, better, faster, smoother, etc etc. Bullfrog have toiled for many man-years to produce this sequel which succeeds in making the original *Populous* look pretty basic - not a feat to be sneezed at.

PUZZLE GAME
TETRIS (Nintendo)

Nintendo's official Gameboy version of this game is undoubtedly the best. Line up the blocks in frenetic black & white action in a quest to make solid lines. May sound crap but is actually fantastic. Arguably the most addictive game *ever* - you ask anyone who has played it!

PLATFORM GAME
SUPER MARIO WORLD (Nintendo)

With the Super Nintendo due to arrive in March, UK punters will soon be wowed by this classic previously only available to owners of grey imported machines. Excellent graphics and a HUGE play area. If only all games could be *this* good.

Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Ocean
Developer Images
Price £25.99 Out Now

SPACE GUN

In space, no-one can eat ice cream. This, unfortunately, is rather a poor joke and, apart from the bit about space, has no relevance to the latest in Ocean's seemingly interminable line of Taito coin-op conversions. YOU HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO RESCUE THE HOSTAGES IMMEDIATELY blasts Space Gun's gung-ho advertising blurb, while up above a hunky space commando splits open a giant alien's stomach with a volley of armour-piercing bullets.

Jolly little animated intro sequences set the scene before the game, and pop up between each level to provide the next part of the story - and an excuse for the next bout of blasting action.

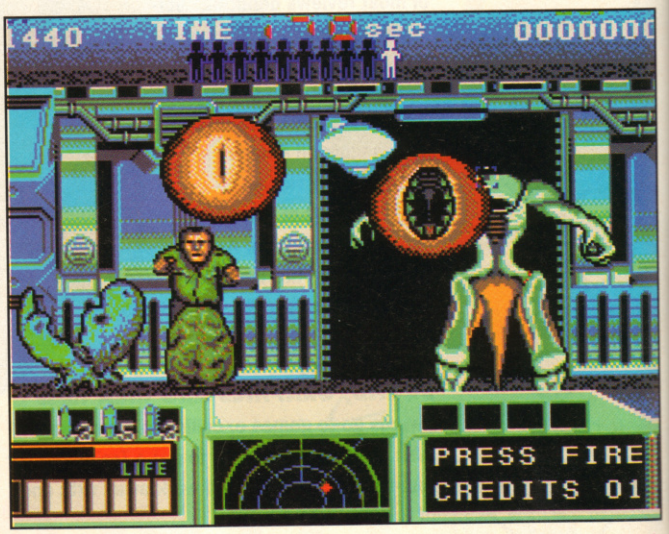
This sort of thing, I have to admit, is right up my street. There's nothing gets me going more than venturing out into space and ensuring the future safety of this island Earth by putting a lot of smoking holes into some stinking alien filth. It comes as a particular disappointment to me, then, to find that the actual level of mayhem and destruction on offer in Space Gun fails to measure up to its bullets-between-the-teeth, all-guns-blazing image.

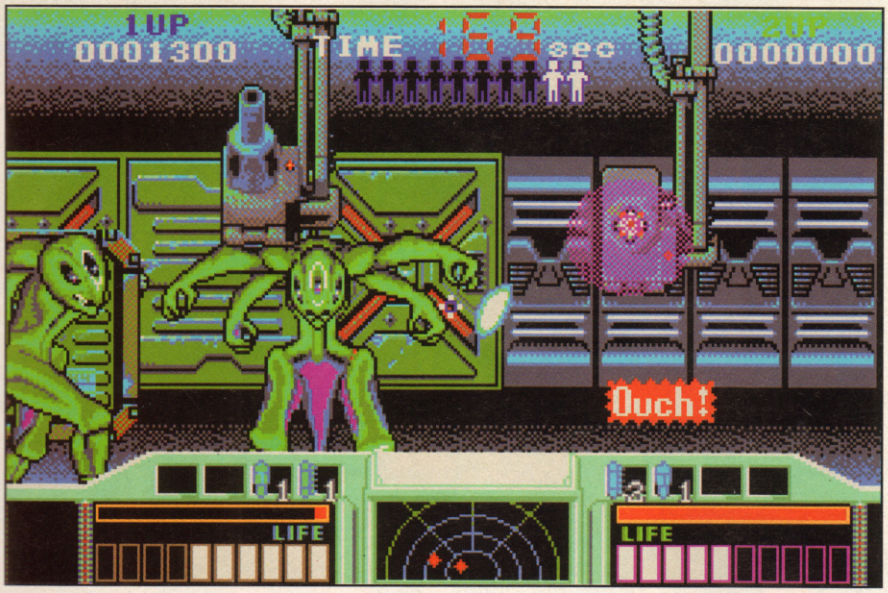
Ever since the runaway success of Taito's Operation Wolf way back in 1987 and the subsequent reemergence of the gun-game as a popular coin-op genre, arcade manufacturers (Taito included) have been pushing and pushing to squeeze more out of what is probably the most limited game type of them all. Apart from adding more guns (the standard now is two, with some daring as many as three to a cabinet) and having bigger explosions, there's been very little in the way of innovation. Space Gun, however, gets away with its blatant unoriginality more than most by virtue of at least trying something different with the scenario.

The year is 2039 and human colonisation of space has begun. However, that inky void is fraught with things infinitely more dangerous than space junk, and a hapless space ship has stumbled upon just such a thing - the breeding ground for a despicable flesh-eating insectoid alien race. As the crippled craft is over-run by the shambling xenomorphs, the crew manages to send a weak distress single back to Earth. Now it's up to you and an optional chum to travel out to the stricken vessel, take out the alien slime and, of course, RESCUE THE HOSTAGES IMMEDIATELY!

Does any of this sound familiar? If it does, it's probably something to do with the fact that Space Gun is, beyond question, the most outrageously brazen rip-off of James Cameron's Aliens you could ever hope to find. Yes, even more than Alien Breed! It's got big Alien-type aliens, mutating humans, pods that look like big leathery eggs, face-huggers, acidic slime... the whole game is played with the perpetual expectation that Sigourney Weaver is going to turn up at any minute and torch everything on screen.

Unfortunately, this does not happen and so the torching of everything on screen is pretty much

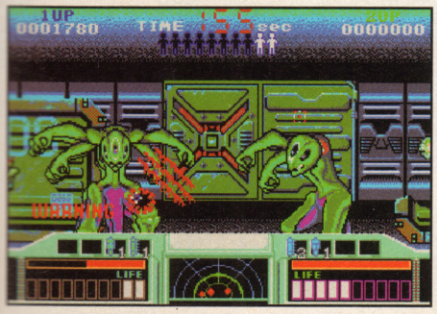




(Left) Bloody hell! It's only Level One and already the action is hotting up! Here we've got a rather nasty alien type to deal with, along with a pair of those pesky drop-down laser cannons. Note, at the bottom of the screen, the remarkably Aliens-esque radar scanner, which details the positions of on and off-screen targets.

Compare & contrast

For my money at least, Ocean's aging Operation Thunderbolt is still a better gun-game than its latest effort. It may be getting on a bit, but it's still the best, smoothest, most accurate and playable product of its type. Space Gun does its best to keep up, and in terms of sheer violence and destruction it's even stevens, but at the end of the day it simply can't quite match Thunderbolt's great variety, super-fluid action and tremendous playability. The only problem is that its military scenario is a bit hackneyed, so Space Gun could well be a better bet for those who fancy something with a more original slant on it.



your responsibility. You're armed with a space gun (never!) capable of firing both conventional photon blobs machine-gun style and far more powerful galactic grenades, via an underslung pump-action rocket-launcher attachment. At least, that's how it was in the arcade - here you just hit the right mouse button.

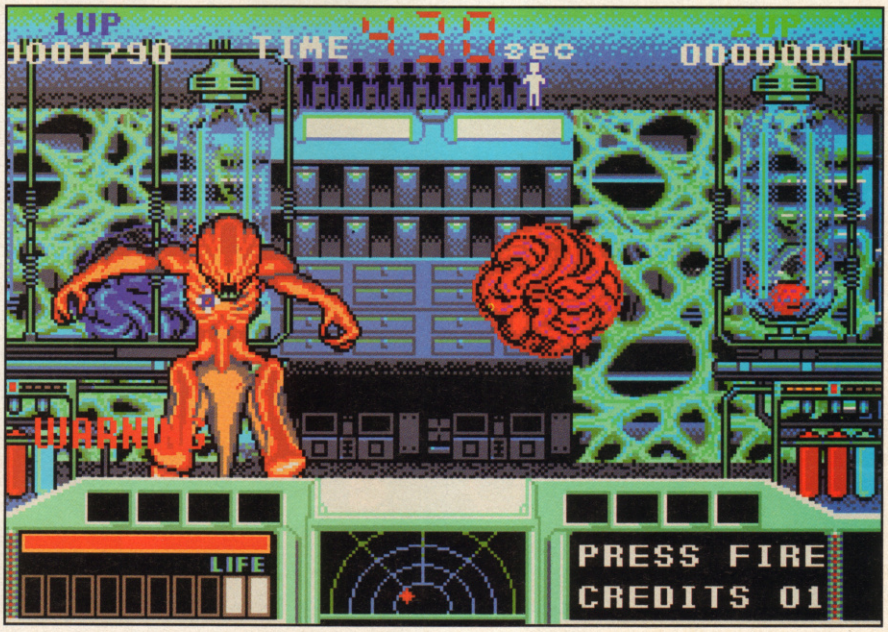
Depending on the level, the game has essentially two types of section. Initially, it's a charge down a 3D corridor, tunnel or cavern, with the aliens either storming towards you or dropping into the screen from above. Unlike the more conventional military-based shootouts, there's no enemy fire to worry about (these aliens are a pretty primitive lot), so they can only inflict damage when up close. The trick is to knock them out before they get into attack position - but when there's half a dozen of the buggers on screen at a time it's not exactly easy, and prioritising targets is vital. In two-player mode it's not too bad as each player only has to worry about his own half of the screen, but on lone missions things can get very heated indeed. Hitting the aliens isn't difficult, but knowing which ones are in more urgent need of photon death is.

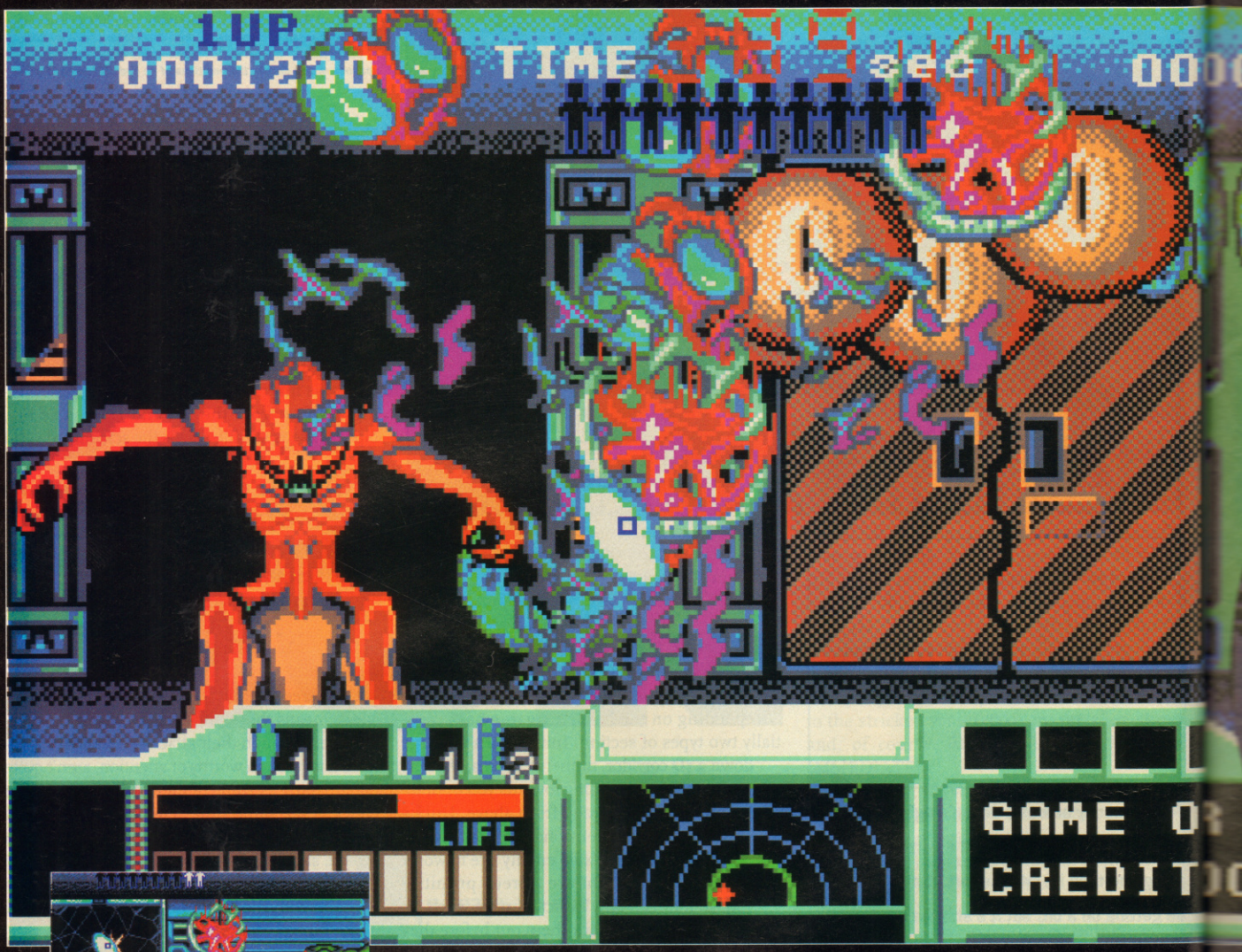
If anything, the 3D section is easier than the horizontally-scrolling scenes that they alternate with. When the end of a corridor is reached, the players are taken on a sideways-on tour of the next, this time with the same adversaries entering the fray from the left and right. The big, bipedal aliens shuffle across the screen and need to be taken out before they get the chance to turn and attack.

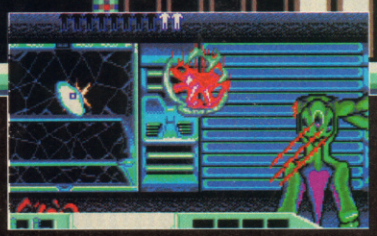
Space Gun gets away with its blatant unoriginality more than most by virtue of at least trying something different with the scenario.

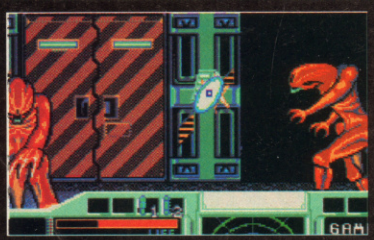
It's interesting that the sheer size of the bigger aliens means they draw the majority of the players' fire, although their attacks are random, sporadic and, though worthy of attention, aren't quite as damaging as some of the smaller critters that attack at the same time. The face-huggers, for example, spring towards the player and stick onto screen, sapping energy continually until they're shot off. If one of these goes un-noticed (and they often do with the larger aliens stomping about in the foreground), it can be disastrous.

Though the player spends a good 99.9% of his time blasting away at the alien hordes, that activ- ▶34





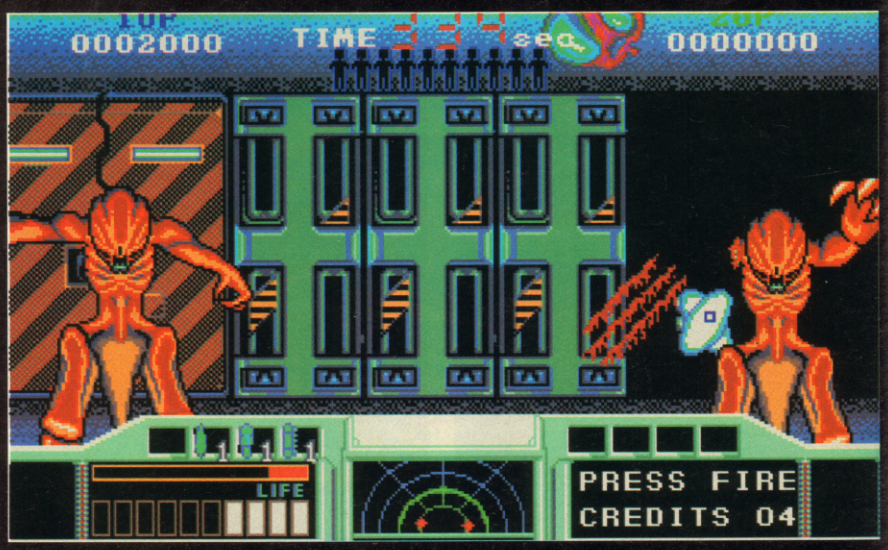




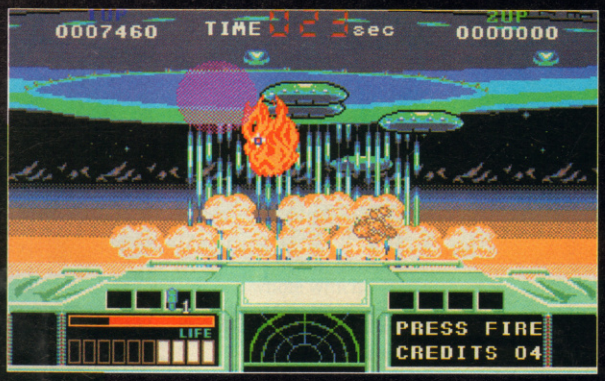
(Above) Things get trickier towards the middle of the mission, when the players speed across the planet surface in a space jeep. Giant UFOs and horrible mutant bat thingummies attack in force. Zoinks!

(Above) Shoot the pods at the top of the screen, else they'll release these horrible football-type things. If any of them get free, knock them out with a well-aimed shot before they get a chance to impact on the screen and cause damage. Easy!

(Below) In Space Gun, it's easy to tell when you've been damaged. Not only does "Ouch!) (understatement of the year) pop up, but on many occasions, a slash of blood from the alien claws appears as well. Note that the alien on the right-hand side has already had one arm shot off - a few more hits should finish him.



Space Gun is full of surprises! Oh yes! But we at ACE wouldn't like you to be sent into shock by some of the horrible ghoulies that accost you during the course of the mission. We couldn't have that on our conscience. So, to prepare you for what lies ahead, here's a sneak look at some of the game's more horrible moments. That way, when they turn up and scream "Boo!" at you, rather than quivering with fear, you can cackle maniacally, yell "Ha Ha, Die, Sucker!" and pump the lot of them full of lead. Luvverly jubbly!

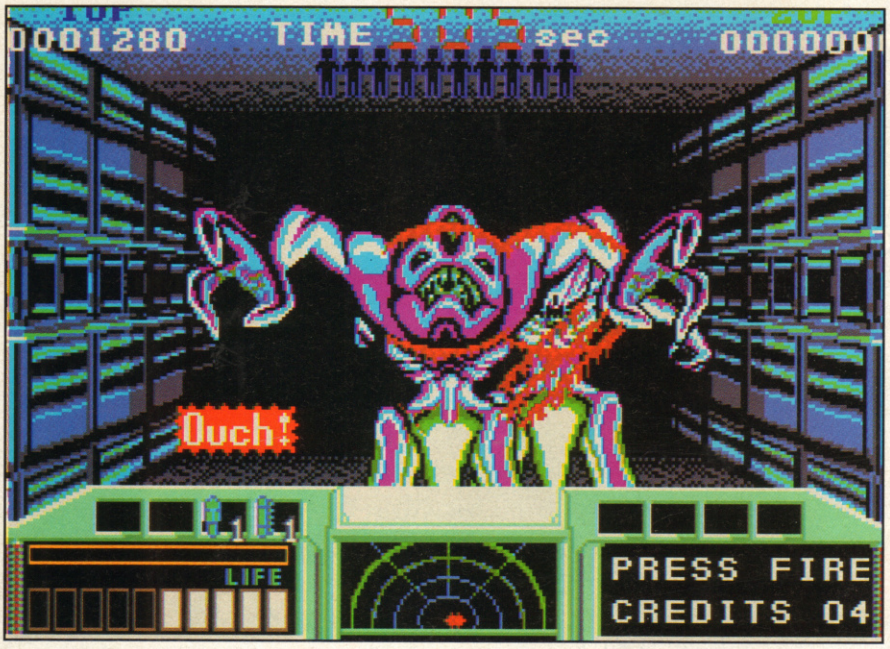


(Above) At the end of one of the planetside stages, the player has to deal with this saucer-shaped monstrosity as it blasts off from the ground. Armies of little saucers are released at you and must be shot down. The fireball indicates a player's grenade has just impacted - but it doesn't seem to have done much good.

(Below) As players journey deeper and deeper in the colony complex, the place becomes more and more infested by the sickening alien decor. Fortunately, it can all be cleaned off by gunfire. You need a strong stomach down here, particularly when piles of half-eaten human remains scroll by. Eeeuuurrghh! The light to the left of the screen, by the way, is a power-up pod. Blow it away to gain one of the game's many helpful extras.

(Above left) Hoorah! The end of the 3D section is in sight as the giant steel doors of the sideways-scrolling section come into view. Occasionally when a junction is reached, directional arrows appear and the player is given the option of choosing the route he wants to take next by firing at the relevant pointer.

(Right) Aaaiiieee! Face-huggers! These are without doubt the peskiest critters in the entire game, as once they stick onto the screen, they continue sucking energy until shot off. And oh look, there's some of those human remains we were talking about. Gruesome, eh?

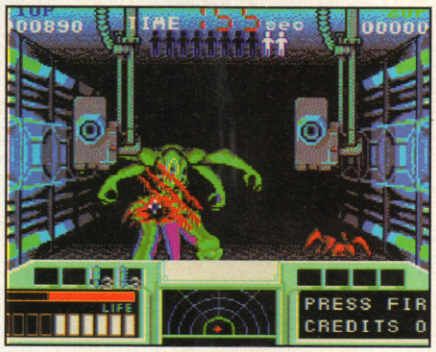


Amiga Version

Aside from a few messy moments when the screen gets too busy, Space Gun is a very clean, colourful and attractive bit of kit. Unfortunately, it's rather let down on the sound side by a selection of droning tunes which will soon have you reaching for the thoughtfully-included MUSIC OFF option. Presentation is slick, with bundles of options, including the facility to plug in a Trojan Light Phaser. Oh, and there's a bit of disk-swapping as well.

ST Version

ST owners can look forward to a version of Space Gun that's almost identical to the Amiga, bar the odd few snips in the colour and sound departments. So that's good news.



(Top) In the 3D section, aliens can only attack when up close. This is where the Space Bar comes in handy, allowing the player to go into reverse, and backpedal down the corridor. This keeps the aliens at a safe distance, and still allows you to blast away at them. It won't get you any closer to the end of the level though, and this option is looked upon as a bit of a bottle-out.

(Above) As well as the mutant threat, the player must also contend with the spaceship's own defences, which have gone haywire. Here, two laser cannons descend from the ceiling and must be shot out before they can open fire.

THAT'S ONE UGLY MUVVA!

A shoot'em-up wouldn't be complete without a liberal sprinkling of end-of-level baddies, and Space Gun has them in spades. Each level is divided into smaller stages, and at the end of the final stage there sits a big, bad, and very very ugly guardian. Their look and behaviour patterns differ from level to level, but the tactics for fighting them remain pretty much the same throughout. Each one can only be knocked out by repeated hits to the corrrect weak spots - in most cases the head or heads. Often these suckers are so hard that killing them with normal fire takes far too long to be practical, and so the only option is to grenade them into oblivion. Aiming is a tricky task, as the head of the alien moves in an unpredictable fashion as it spits its deadly venom at you. Some of the more bizarre guardians, like the one in the top picture, are best tackled with a friend, with each player looking after one head each. Alternatively, two players can work together with one chap assaulting the alien itself while the other covers him by knocking out the creature's own weapons as they are released.

31▶ ity alone won't get the mission completed - if you're good, a constant stream of fire will just about keep you alive on a regular basis, and then you can start thinking about the real objective - hostage rescue. On early levels, the hapless space colonists simply appear at random intervals, and the trick is not too shoot them in the time it takes for them to run, arms flailing, to safety.

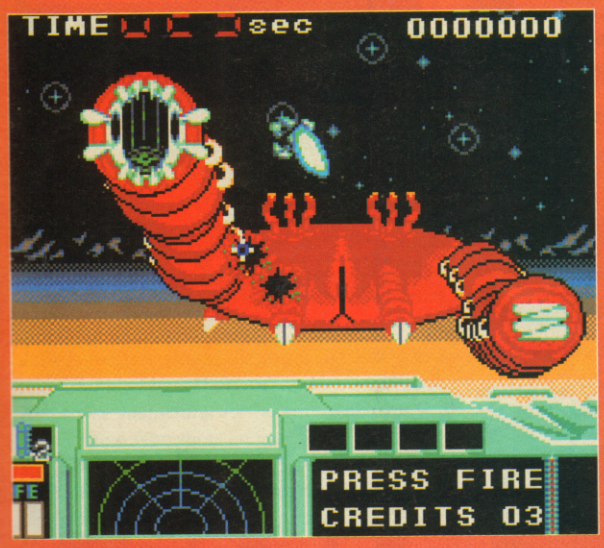
The humans are never in any danger of getting hurt by one of the aliens, but such is the intensity of the fire coming from the players' weapons that it's almost an odds-on bet that they'll be mown down by friendly fire unless special care is taken. Such is the importance of the hostages' survival, it's probably worth holding fire altogether and suffering the consequences while the friendly gets to safety.

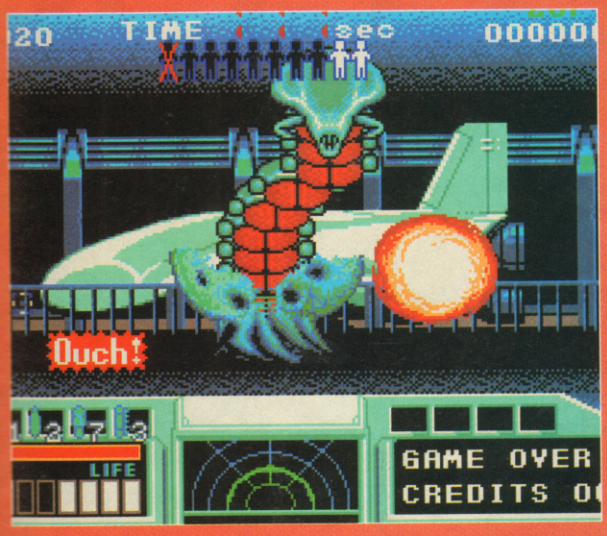
On later levels, things get slightly trickier. Hostages are trapped from the ankles down in egg-shaped pods, presumably for consumption or gestation, and will be counted as dead unless the player can shatter the pod with a well-aimed laser blast, allowing the captive to get free. The problem here is that a shot like this takes a lot of accuracy, else the well-meaning photon bolt will take out not just the egg, but its captive as well. To ensure this doesn't happen, a good few seconds are required to aim - and this, of course, means lowering the defences against the relentless aliens.

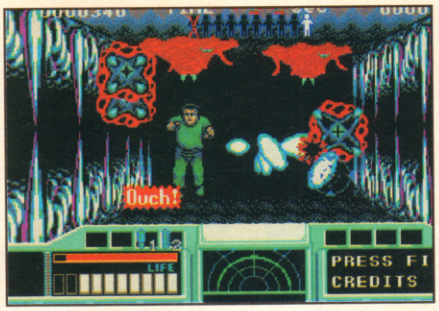
Hostages can also be found encased in bizarre cocoons hanging from the ceiling - again, a single shot sets them free - while others are not what they seem at all. I was particularly impressed (and genuinely surprised, the first time I saw them) by the humans which run towards you as normal, then mutate into a hideous alien at the last moment and attack you. In a game that's otherwise generally free of surprises, it's a nice little treat.

Aside from the hostages, equally-attractive distractions from the main thrust of the shooting action come in the form of those old shoot-'em-up favourites, the power-ups. In a game like this, where firepower and destructive force is everything, collectable bits and bobs can often be one of the most vital aspects. Here, they're provided by flashing lights that appear built into the background every now and again. Smashing the light reveals any of a clutch of different collectables, ranging from the obligatory energy extends and refills to special super-hard bullets and grenades, body armour and, my particular favourite, an expanded target cursor which makes the business of aiming a whole lot easier.

Unlike the likes of Wolf and Thunderbolt, though, there's no need for extra ammo as it's







in unlimited quantity. The game works instead on a gunpower system, which means the player can fire constantly until his weapon overheats, at which point it'll only fire at a fraction of its normal rate until the trigger is released and the gun gets a chance to cool off.

I'm not really sure how well the system works as a replacement to ammunition. True, it means the player doesn't have to worry about collecting extra magazines, but it's actually more troublesome and damaging to have to leave off the trigger every couple of minutes. Supposedly the idea is to force the player to regulate his fire rather than blaze away constantly at everything in sight, but in a game like this, anything that restrains the player must be a bad thing.

The difference between the coin-op Space Gun and this conversion is about the same as the difference between going out for a proper curry and having one of those horrid sloppy ones out of the microwave.

Surely it's the player's choice if he wants to play like a maniac or in a more thoughtful, conservative manner? The new Terminator 2 coin-op does things the same way, and it winds me right up. Sega's Line of Fire, on the other hand, has a no-holds-barred policy on weapons, and that works fine. Judging by how different people play Space Gun, the system nevertheless seems to work okay for some. I just found it annoying and restrictive.

Minor gameplay wobbles like this, however, are not symptomatic of Space Gun as a whole which is, pretty much, a very well thought-out product. Given the restrictions of the genre, the game does have elements of originality, and the alien scenario, backed up by some impressively-defined and moodily-coloured visuals creates a dark, suspenseful atmosphere.

In fact, the reason why Space Gun doesn't quite come off as a game isn't really anybody's fault. The coin-op was perfectly fine, and the conversion is about as accurate and speedy as 16 little bits will allow. The problem is simply that a game like Space Gun relies on a sense of 'weight' in the graphics, sound and feel to provide the entertainment. It's not as if there's much in the way of challenging strategy, and it doesn't even ask for any real dexterity or arcade skills, so everything hangs on the aesthetic side - the huge, hefty explosions, the gut-wrenching shrieks of the aliens and, of course, the recoil on the gun. Now all this works fine in the arcades but because the Amiga simply can't deliver the same aesthetic impact, at least 75% of the enjoyment and atmosphere is lost immediately.

What we're left with is by no means a mess. I enjoyed myself playing it and it really does look and feel very nice, but nevertheless the difference between the coin-op Space Gun and this conversion is about the same as the difference between going out for a proper curry and having one of those horrid sloppy ones out of the microwave. Images, the converters, can by no means be blamed for this, as they've made the very best of what could well be considered a pointless conversion, and the result is a damn sight more enjoyable than, say, the conversions of Line of Fire or Beast Busters. Make no mistake, if the only thing you use your brain for is to stop the top of your head falling in, you'll have a good time here. Just don't expect too much.

● **Gary Whitta**

RATINGS

SPACE GUN RATINGS

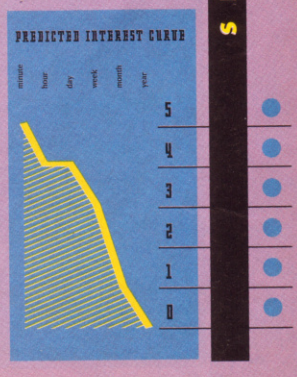
Non-stop action.
Pretty and colourful.
Lots of nice touches.

Not much variety between scenes.
Sonic side is let down.

790 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
8	1	5	7

Space Gun is most definitely NOT, as you would expect, the sort of game that takes a long while to get into. It's a great laugh at first, but from that point onwards things take a gradually downward turn in the interest stakes. The basic problem is that, unlike the majority of games where, if you get killed you can try some different approach or tactic, in Space Gun all you can do is keep firing at the right targets, so when you get killed all you can do is go back and try more or less the same thing again and hope you're a bit luckier this time. The two-player mode is definitely more fun than playing solo, but it's not a major fun-booster except when fighting for the power-ups, as most of the time you're far too busy worrying about your own half of the screen to see what your companion's up to. Still, there's enough solid action here to keep persistent players interested for around a month, and then it's back-of-the-shelf city, I'm afraid.



Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Disney Software
Developer NovaLogic
Price £30.99 Out Now

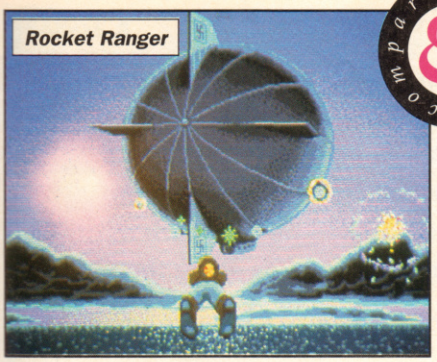
THE ROCKETEER

There's a scene in the movie where one of the characters cries, "It's the Rocketeer!" and another, confused and slightly non-plussed, replies, "The Rock-a-who?". Sad to say, this was pretty much the reaction of the film-going public who, torn between The Rocketeer and either *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves* or *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, chose to put their collective bum on a seat in the company of Cuddly Kev or Big Arnie rather than some unknown little squirt with a vacuum cleaner on his back.

This was, of course, not a little unfortunate for Disney, who had spent nearly $35 million dollars in the hope that The Rocketeer would be THE Summer Box-Office Blockbuster of 1991 (it had eventually recouped $45 million by the end of last August - not exactly a flop, but don't hold your breath waiting for the sequel).

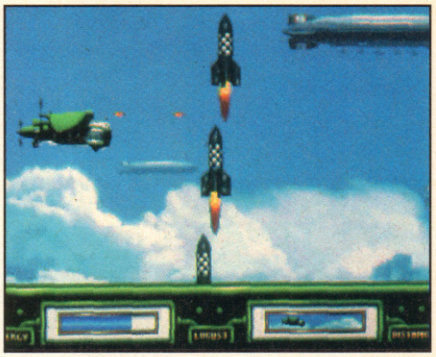
Probably the saddest thing about The Rocketeer's disappointing box-office receipts is that the film is actually pretty good. It's based on The Rocketeer comic drawn by Dave Stevens and, like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, is a 'tribute' to the cheaply-made action/adventure serials that played in children's movie matinees throughout the 1930s. One thing's for sure, it's a damn sight more enjoyable than Costner's bizarre mid-Atlantic playing of the Hood legend. Most notable are its flying sequences, courtesy of George Lucas's special effects outfit Industrial Light & Magic, which are marvelously exhilarating to watch. Who knows? With its release on video due any time now it may start to win some of the public acclaim it rightfully deserves.

So with the film's poor public reception, the more cynical and bitter amongst the reviewing fraternity (i.e. me) might be forgiven - but not con-



compare & contrast

In theme at least, The Rocketeer shares several similarities to Cinemaware's topper Rocket Ranger. For a start, they... er... both feature a rocket pack. And Nazis. And Zeppelins. Not surprising really, since both were inspired by the old movie serials. Both games are basically a collection of mini-games. But whereas The Rocketeer is just that and nothing else, Rocket Ranger frames the games in some simple but involving strategy, making it by far the longer lasting and ultimately more enjoyable choice. Rocket Ranger's plot is also far more engaging, involving the hero's attempts to thwart a Nazi plot to take over the whole World!



doned - for expecting some slapdash piece of rubbish intended to cash in on the film's few fans. And these suspicions are heightened when you look at the screen shots on the back of packaging. But you couldn't be more wrong. Sure, The Rocketeer's got problems (which I'll come to in a moment) but as it turns out, it's is one of the classiest film licences I've ever seen.

The most immediate gripe any discerning punter could have with the game is that its scenario is totally dissimilar to that of the film. The main characters and the main plot thrust - evil Nazis try to steal revolutionary rocket pack from hunky clean-cut American hero - are the same but the details are completely different. The movie was a moderately complicated yarn involving a Nazi agent posing as a Hollywood heartthrob, Mafia mobsters, the F.B.I. and even Howard Hughes. The game, on the other hand, is a far simpler. The main deviation from the basic scenario described above is that having failed to lay their hands on the rocket pack the Nazis grab the hero's girlfriend and make off with her instead, entailing a long airborne chase and a bout of fisticuffs on the tail of a Zeppelin for the climax.

The game is split into five levels or, as they are called here in keeping with the subject matter's pulp adventure inspirations, 'Episodes' encompassing a variety of gameplay styles - shoot-'em-up, beat-'em-up, and so on. As the astute reader will have spotted Disney have taken a dip in Ocean's Bumper Book Of How To Do The Game Of The Film. A hackneyed, clichéd and uninspired approach to game design it may be but, as the likes of *Robocop* and *Batman* have shown in the past, as long as it's done well there's no reason why the final result can't be an excellent game.

But it's strange. Just when Ocean are making attempts to move away from the style of tie-in they used to churn out with the innovative likes of *Hudson Hawk* and *Robocop 3*, it appears Disney have appeared to pick up from where they left off.

Regardless of its few minor flaws, The Rocketeer still rates as one of the classiest film licences yet.

First impressions are excellent. Each episode is preceded by a series of comic-style screens detailing the plot's development. Like Sierra and Lucasfilm the graphics have been drawn and painted by a 'traditional' artist then digitised. The results are superb, and in keeping with The Rocketeer's true origins, but it's yet another distancing of the game from the film.

It's all very bizarre. First the plot differences and now the use of comic artwork as opposed to digitised stills from the film. You begin to get the impression that the game designers wanted the links with the film to be as few as possible. If nothing else, I guess it avoids the hassles of negotiating the rights to use the various stars' likenesses in the game (a thorny problem that US Gold failed to surmount with its disappointing *Godfather* licence). Mind you, since Disney Software handled the game you wouldn't think there'd be a problem. Oh well.

The first episode opens in Bigelow's Air Circus where Cliff Secord, a dashing and youthful air jockey, is about to enter a potentially-lucrative air race competition. If Cliff can prove his aviatorial skills by winning two races in a row then his mechanic, mentor and eccentric inventor Ambrose 'Peevy' Peabody will let him take the amazing Cirrus X-3 rocket pack for a trial run.

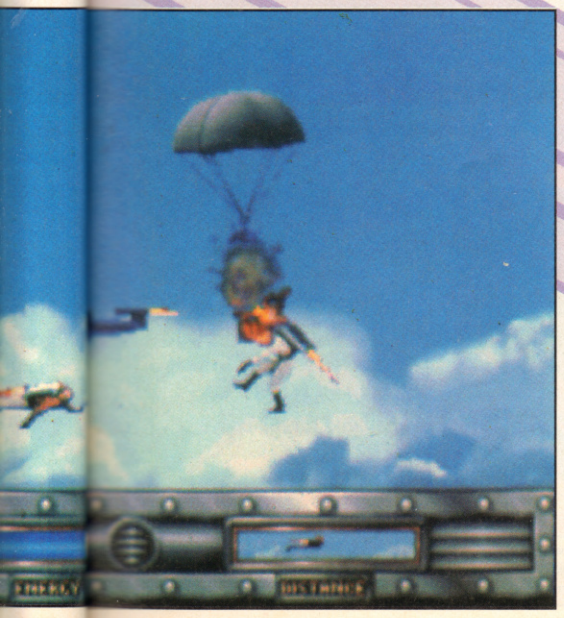
The player, as Cliff, has a choice of one of three planes for the big race, each with differing top speeds, accelerations and turning abilities. The player then has to be first to complete a given number of 'laps' around two red-chequered poles placed several hundred yards apart. Flight control is basic in the extreme - it's simply a matter of accelerating, decelerating, climbing, or banking with any combination of the keyboard, mouse or joystick. The recipe to success is to cut as tight as you can into the inside of the lap without hitting the end poles or your competitors.

The player has two views of the race, side-on and 3D. The side-on view takes up most of the screen, with the player's plane staying centre of the screen and the background scrolling to follow its progress around the course. The 3D view, set in the bottom right-hand corner of the status strip, is tiny.

Trouble is, while the side-on view is very pretty and provides a lot of entertainment for any spectators of your games-playing prowess, it makes the task of playing an already bloody difficult game virtually impossible because, despite some helpful ground shadows, it's tough working out where your plane is in relation to the course. The 3D view is far more useful, but it's a pain not because it's so small (size, after all, isn't important) but because you can see the visually far more exciting side-on action in your peripheral vision. If you imagine going to see a mega-blockbuster at the flicks and then being forced by a sadistic usherette to watch it on some titchy handheld TV then you'll get some idea of what I mean.

For the first game the air race is surprisingly difficult (perhaps a little too much so) though great fun. The only real gripe is that it would have been better to inject a little more variety by making the planes fly something more complex than an oval - a figure of eight, say. Also, when the player finally gets to try out the rocket pack it comes as a bit of a disappointment to discover that it handles identically to the planes but faster.

Into the second episode and the foul Nazis make their attempt to grab the rocket pack. Quite *why* they're so keen to get their hands on it is never made clear, because it's made obvious in this and ▶40

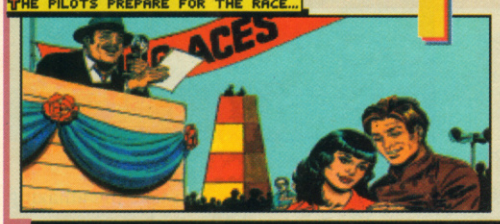


THE ROCKETEER

EPISODE 1

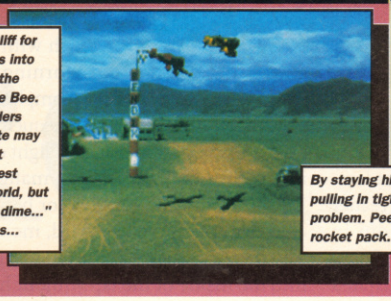
It's an exciting day for Cliff Secord and his girlfriend Jenny Blake. Dashing Cliff is about to take part in Bigelow's Air Circus race!

THE PILOTS PREPARE FOR THE RACE...



The Rocketeer is structured like the movie serials that inspired it - short action-packed episodes, each ending with a gut-wrenching cliff hanger. Join Cliff Secord, A.K.A. The Rocketeer, in his gripping mission to rescue his girlfriend Jenny Blake from the clutches of the nefarious Nazis. There's thrills. There's spills. And there are a few game-playing tips along the way too if you read carefully!

Jenny kisses Cliff for luck as he hops into the cockpit of the snub-nosed Gee Bee. "Hmmm," ponders Cliff, "This crate may not be the best looking or fastest plane in the world, but she turns on a dime..." The race begins...



By staying high, levelling out on the straights and pulling in tight on the corners Cliff wins with no problem. Peevy, Cliff's mechanic, prepares the rocket pack...

Even the Caudron is no match for the supersonic speed of the Cirrus X-3 rocket pack! Cliff laps the other planes time after time. But Cliff's devil-may-care flying nearly loses him his life when he brushes a little too close to the Wedell-Williams' tail!

CROWDS LOVE A HERO!

Cliff flies like a bird - and the crowd goes wild! The proud Jenny greets the returning hero with a long and lingering kiss as Peevy throws his cap in the air with joy. But sinister figures lurk in the shadows...

BACK INSIDE THE HANGAR...

EPISODE 2

Cliff and Peevy scan the Cirrus X-3's blueprints. Peevy mutters "I might be able to make the pack faster if I..."

But Peevy's chatter is cut short by a harsh guttural bark "Olt man! You vill gif zee rocket planz to me!" Cliff and Peevy look up in surprise. Nazis! And they've got Jenny hostage! One of the Nazi's tries to grab the blueprints but Cliff sees him off with a well-aimed punch. Grabbing the trooper's dropped pistol, Cliff takes aim at the foul villains...

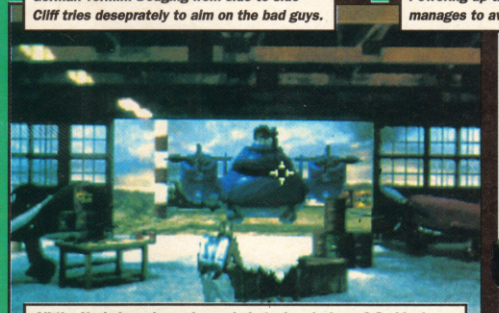
~ Who are the 'sinister figures'? ~

~ And what do they want with Cliff, Jenny and Peevy? ~

Find out... in the next exciting episode of...
THE ROCKETEER!

The hangar seems to be infested with the German vermin! Dodging from side to side Cliff tries deseprately to aim on the bad guys.

One of the Nazis lobs a stick of dynamite! Powering up the rocket pack our hero manages to avoid the deadly blast.



All the Nazis have been downed - but where's Jenny? Suddenly Cliff is deafened by the thwock of rotors as a German VTOL craft slowly lowers into view, machine guns blazing.

Cliff survives the attack and runs outside to see Jenny being bundled into a plane. But before he can reach her it takes off. But the Germans have forgotten that The Rocketeer can go where no normal man can...

~ Is Cliff's rocket pack fast enough to catch the speeding Locust? ~

~ Why have the evil Nazis kidnapped Jenny? ~

~ And what foul traps have they laid for the brave Cliff?

~ Find out... in the next exciting episode of...
THE ROCKETEER!

EPISODE 3

During the Bigelow Air Circus Jenny Blake, girlfriend to Cliff Secord (also known as The Rocketeer), is kidnapped by evil Nazi stormtroopers who are returning to their Fatherland in a stolen Locust plane.

Cliff, noble and brave as ever, powers up his amazing rocket packs and prepares to give chase, unaware he might be playing right into the Germans' hands...

Roaring into the skies on a pillar of fire Cliff soon has the fleeing plane in sight. But suddenly the air is filled with Nazis - wearing their own primitive sputtering versions of his own rocket pack! No-one had ever dreamed that German technological know-how had evolved this much!

Having seen off the Nazis Cliff relaxes for a moment thinking the danger is past... then a V2 rocket zooms at him!

The closer Cliff gets to the plane the more vicious the Nazi attack becomes! They'll stop at nothing to kill him!

At last Cliff climbs aboard the Locust, knocks out the pilot and finds a dazed Peevy - but no Jenny!

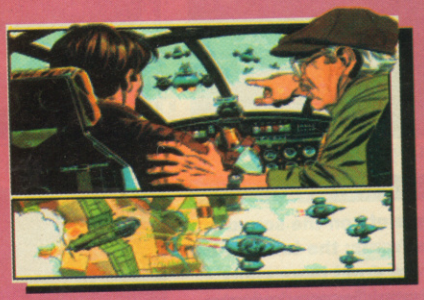
~ What have the Nazis done with Cliff's beloved Jenny? ~

~ Find out... in the next exciting episode of...

THE ROCKETEER!

EPISODE 4

Having caught up with the fleeing German-commandeered Locust, Cliff finds Peevy. But Jenny's whereabouts is still unknown! Peevy is a little shocked and stunned by his ordeal, but manages to explain that the Germans have moved Jenny to their command vessel - a giant hydrogen-filled Zeppelin! Cliff and Peevy clamber into the Locust's cockpit and prepare to get Jenny back once and for all! But the Nazis have despatched a whole squadron of deadly VTOL craft with orders to destroy them!



It's a vicious battle, with Cliff having to face V1 rockets and floating air mines as well as the rapid-firing VTOLs.

But with skill and daring Cliff manages to overcome all obstacles and finally reaches the Nazi Zeppelin.

Peevy spots Jenny - on the tail fin of the blimp being held captive by the Nazi colonel! Time for The Rocketeer again...

~ Can The Rocketeer finally defeat the foul Nazi scum? ~

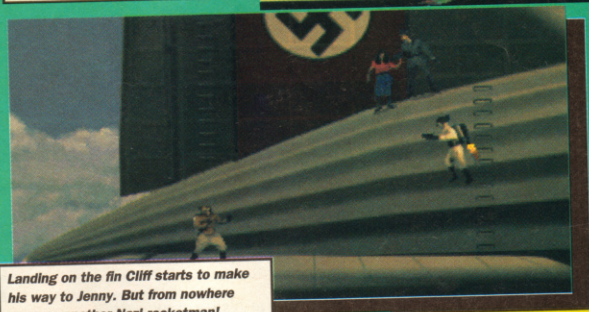
~ Find out... in the next and final episode of...

THE ROCKETEER!

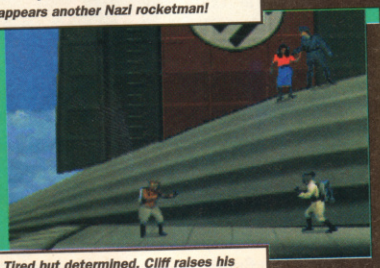
EPISODE 5

Donning the rocket pack and fin for what he hopes will be the last time, Cliff prepares to leap out of the Locust and onto the Zeppelin tail fin, leaving Peevy to return the stolen plane to its rightful owners.

But as Cliff tumbles out of the fuselage hatch Peevy cries, "But Cliff - your rocket pack doesn't have enough fuel to get you back to the Air Circus!"



Landing on the fin Cliff starts to make his way to Jenny. But from nowhere appears another Nazi rocketman!

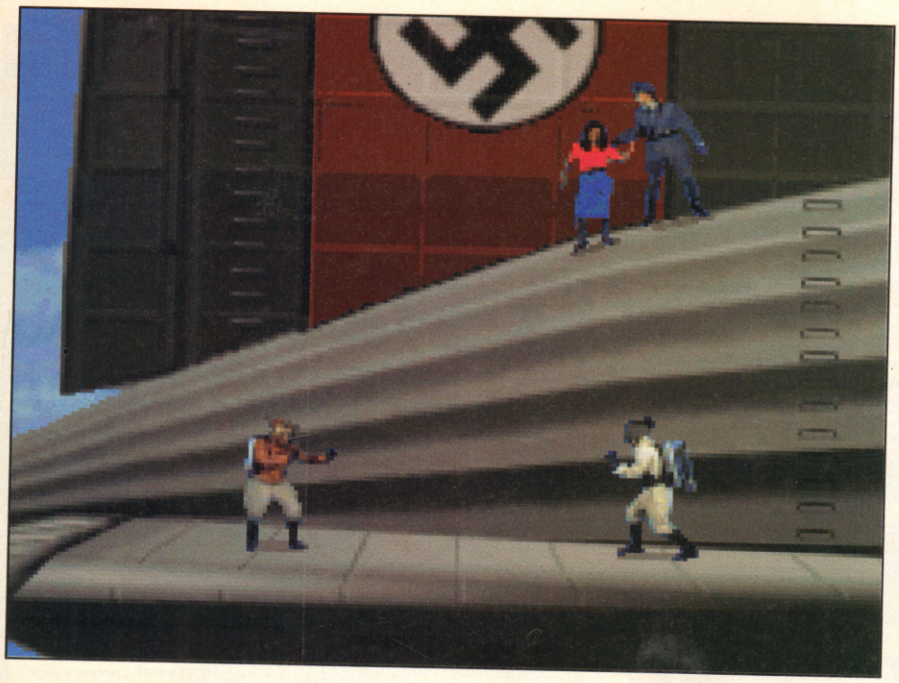


Tired but determined, Cliff raises his dukes and prepares to fight hand-to-hand for his love.

~ Can Cliff defeat the Nazi henchmen and reach Jenny? ~

~ Find out... when you play...

THE ROCKETEER!



(Left) The final battle atop the Zeppelin is drama-packed to say the least. As the sadistic Nazi colonel clutching a struggling Jenny looks on, Nazi rocketmen fly down to indulge in some old-fashioned man-to-man combat. Each Nazi punch weakens Cliff and sends him reeling - if his energy hits rock bottom or he takes one step back too many, he'll plummet to his doom. If that were not enough to worry about, the colonel pulls out his Luger and starts taking pot-shots at our hapless hero. And all because the lady loves a man in a rocket pack...

(Below) Mind your step! The consequences of falling off a Zeppelin do not bear thinking about.

(Bottom) The Rocketeer title screen, with each letter zooming in dramatically from the distance like shots from a machine gun. The title screen is exemplary of the superb presentation throughout the game - top notch!

37▶ later episodes is that the Nazis already possess their own rocket pack technology. Must be after that superior Yanky know-how that only comes from being able to lead a life free from oppression in a God-fearing democratic society. Or something.

It's basically *Operation Wolf* - or more accurately *Cabal* - in an aircraft hangar. Nazi commandos pop up from behind workbenches, aircraft and oil cans while others fly in through the hangar doors to take pot-shots at the Rocketeer who stalks the floor area to the front of the screen. The player can move a sight around the screen to zap the baddies as they appear. If the sight nears the edge of the screen the Rocketeer walks left or right and the screen scrolls to follow him. Energy bars for the Rocketeer and the Nazis slowly shrink at the bottom of the screen. The player has to finish off the villainous Nazis before they do the same to him.

Op Wolf clones are a staple ingredient of these multi-section style games, but The Rocketeer's take on it is better than most. It's all good, violent fun and the realistically digitised figures make the action far more involving than it might otherwise be. The scrolling, though super smooth for a PC, can be a bit hard on the eyes at time as it rocks back and forth to follow the player's darting sight.

At the end of the second episode the Nazis, realising they are no match for Cliff's marksmanship, kidnap Peevy and - Horror! - the luscious Jenny Blake, Cliff's girly, and try to make good their escape in a commandeered US experimental plane, the odd-looking Locust. Firing up the rocket pack Cliff takes to the sky - a sky filled with more squadrons of Nazi commandos!

Yes, episode three is a horizontal-scrolling shoot-'em-up, but a pretty good one. The player has to shoot or dodge all manner of Nazi fiends, some zooming in wearing rockets, others gliding down on parachutes. If that wasn't enough there are frequent deadly storms of bombs that rain down and V2 rockets that blast in, homing on the Rocketeer. Interestingly more deadly than the standard enemies is the tumbling burning wreckage left behind when shot. Small red balloons award the player three-way fire fire, but the effects last for such a short time it's worth the bother or risk of trying to collect them.

Episode four and, having caught up with the Locust just as his pack runs out of fuel, Cliff learns from a dazed Peevy that Jenny is in fact further ahead, held captive aboard a giant hydrogen-filled Zeppelin. Taking hold of the Locust's control Cliff heads off into the wide blue yonder once more. It's more shoot-'em-up action, but much, much harder. This time the player is beset by strange German VTOL craft, balloon-mounted bombs, V1 rockets that fire up from the bottom of the screen in a most unexpected way and not a glimmer of a power-up in sight. To be honest with you, I could have done without having another shoot-'em-up straight after the first - oooh, my aching trigger finger!

At last Cliff catches up with the Nazi blimp. Leaving Peevy to fly the Locust back to base, Cliff tumbles down onto the Zeppelin's tail to rescue Jenny. But the Nazis have seen him coming and

PC Version

No complaints on the sound or graphics fronts; the tunes and effects are great (especially with a Sound Source device) and the digitised/hand-drawn graphics are even better - the smooth scrolling has to be seen to be believed! Although a hard disc is, as ever, recommended, the game is perfectly playable from floppy. The only fly(boy) in the ointment is that you really need a 16MHz and up machine to reap maximum enjoyment from the game.

Amiga Version

The Amiga version won't be quite as pretty as the PC's 256-colour one, but with Disney at the helm expect something fairly snazzy. In terms of gameplay there's nothing here that the Amiga couldn't handle with its blitter tied behind its back. While The Rocketeer's simplicity and ease is acceptable for the largely arcade-naive PC owner, the hardened Amiga gamer may find the going just a bit too easy. The Rocketeer should be coming in for landing in May.

ST Version

While there's no way that the ST version could look as good as the PC one, there's no reason why it shouldn't play identically. And there lies the problem - unless Disney beef up the gameplay (unlikely) then players who have cut their gaming teeth on the current crop of state-of-the-art ST title are likely to find The Rocketeer something of a breeze to complete. Look out for an update in the Reviews Directory around about May.

have prepared a little... reception for him. Now only one beefy Bierwürst muncher with fists like coconuts stands between Cliff, his beloved Jenny and the downfall of the Third Reich. Maybe.

Even by beat-'em-up standards, which are not renowned for their complexity, this, the fifth and final episode in The Rocketeer saga, is basic to say the least. The player can move Cliff left or right along the Zeppelin tail fin and make him duck or punch. The trick is to duff the Nazi over before he forces you off the tail to your doom. It's a long way down.

There's no denying that The Rocketeer is a quality product. The programmers have pulled out all the stops to make sure it looks and sounds superb.

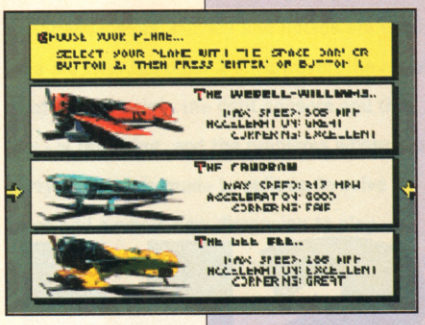
There's no denying that The Rocketeer is a quality product. The programmers have pulled out all the stops to make sure it looks and sounds superb. The scrolling is nothing short of a miracle for the PC, the animation is brilliant (Hey! This is Disney after all!) and the tunes and effects are suitably pacy and atmospheric (especially if you've got one of Disney's Sound Source devices - see the 'Mmmmm... Sounds saucy!' box for more).

So, nothing to fault in the aesthetics. My real problems lay in the gameplay. While all the mini-games are great fun and very playable, there's a serious lack of any strong challenge - I got past episodes two and three on my second attempts. The password system doesn't help things either. I can't see anyone who is even halfway decent at arcade games taking more than a couple of days to finish the game. Perhaps this is not so much of a problem for the less arcade-orientated PC market, but potential Amiga or ST buyers should beware.

(Niggle: There's no password to the last episode, forcing you to play episode four just to get to the beat-'em-up. This is unfair. If you going to have a password system then have a full one. This is just a lazy way of making the game harder to finish.)

This easiness would perhaps not be so bad if there were more than just five levels, perhaps repeat but harder appearances of the second or fifth episodes, for example. As the developers have decided to completely ignore the film's plot anyway, it wouldn't have been to hard to write a scenario that involved more of these sections. As is stands you can't help feeling more than a little short-changed.

● David Upchurch



(Above) Before the race the player gets to choose between three planes. Each has differing top speeds, accelerations and cornering abilities. If you want some good advice, go for the stocky little Gee Bee - it's tight corner-taking is essential if you're to win. (By the way, this plane has nothing to do with the late-70s male pop trio of a similar name.)

(Below) Top racing action! Ignore the attractive 2D view - experienced players will opt to fly by the tiny 3D one in the corner. If you don't take my advice, you could end up like the unfortunate Cliff (bottom).

MMMMM... SOUNDS SAUCY!

Yes! It's true! For the paltry sum of $39.95 (UK price to be confirmed) you can play the film *in your very own home!*

Well, not quite. The Sound Source, a wedge of cream plastic slab the size of a large hard-back novel, won't turn your PC into some amazing multimedia device. But it does give you some of the best speech and FX ever.

And it adds incredibly to the enjoyment of The Rocketeer. Instead of having to read the speech bubbles that come up in the cartoon intros, you can sit back and have them read out to you by actors performing the roles of the various characters. It's particularly effective on the plane choosing menu where, as you cycle through the choices, Cliff's pondersome voice murmurs "Mmmm, the Gee Bee's slow but it's great for taking corners..." and such like.

There's is a drawback - the samples slows the game dramatically. Fine on the big boys, but 8MHzers will not be impressed by the frequent thrice per second screen update.

RATINGS

Arcade-quality game graphics with super-smooth scrolling – on a PC!

Inspired cartoon-style presentation generates strong 1930s atmosphere.

Action-packed bag of varied game styles maintain player addiction.

Characters aside, it's nothing to do with The Rocketeer film.

Games are too simple and easy to complete, making for poor VFM.

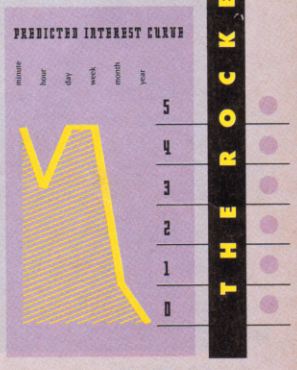
More buzzing about in the rocket pack would have been nice.

THE ROCKETEER RATINGS

817 PC RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
9	2	9	9

Right from take off The Rocketeer impresses; the first episode looks and sounds marvellous and plays well too (as do the rest, for the matter). If only is wasn't so hard to win! Some hair-tearing later and the skilled player should discover that the episode is actually a breeze to complete - if you know the secret. The subsequent episodes are easier. A lot easier. Too easy, in fact. And chances are that it will only take the typical player a few days or so of concentrated play to rescue Jenny. Still, while it lasts The Rocketeer is a great-looking joy and comes recommended to all those poor PC owners starved of out-and-out slambang arcade action.



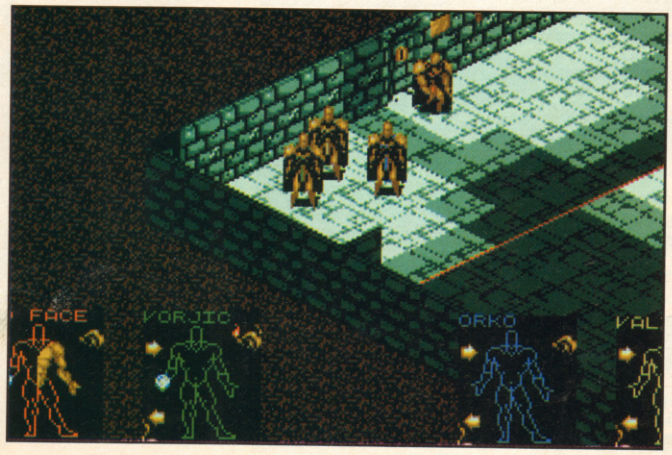
Genre Role-Playing Game
Publisher Domark
Developer Teque London
Price £TBA Available March

SHADOW LANDS

You can't help but feel a little bit sorry for those poor berated role-playing gamer types. With the generally accepted stereotype of them as a strangely-smelling bunch of sad anal retentives decked out in grubby anoraks and corduroy trousers, wearing Coke-bottle-thick National Health glasses held together by some week-old Elastoplasts and having a

(Above) There appears to be no way to open the great oaken door. But a feel along the wall with the hand pointer reveals a secret panel. Send one of the warriors to give it a push and open sesame!

(Below) No, that red warrior hasn't fallen over. He's bending down to pick up a silver coin. It's wise to collect even the most trivial looking piece of bric-a-brac you see lying about - you never know when it'll be useful.



'street credibility' that lies somewhere between that of an accountant and a train spotter, it can't be an easy life.

And true, all that Thringeldell the Elf scores 3 Hit Points damage with the mighty Magic Level 14 Runesword Morfrax against an Armour Class 8 Balrog malarkey does seem to have an alarmingly high attraction for the more socially disadvantaged members of our society. But be honest - if you were some stereotypical spotty little Herbert who gets picked last in Games, wouldn't you relish the chance to be a muscle-bound sexually-athletic barbarian who spends all his time cracking skulls, wenching and drinking a lot, if only for a couple of hours in your imagination?

The sad thing is this image problem - along with all those rules! - does tend to turn many of the more style-conscious people off a gaming genre that can be and often is highly entertaining and involving.

On computer RPGs have had somewhat wider acceptance, mainly because the majority of products labelled 'role-playing games' are actually not that at all. Table-top RPGs are normally played by a group of people, each assuming varied fantasy personalities who must interact with each other and any characters met in the game world. A major reason for the genre's phenomenal success is the fun that can be had from this interaction.

Computer gaming, on the other hand, is largely a solitary occupation. And while current generation computers can easily cope with all the boring number crunching and statistics logging that RPGs require, simulating an intelligent charac-

ter with its own objectives and prejudices is an altogether more complex affair. Which is why computer-based RPGs centre more around the combat and puzzle-solving - that's something a computer can understand and cope with.

But even with the genre stripped down to its basics and shorn of the embarrassing 'role playing', it still remained a niche market - a stable, healthy-selling one, admittedly, but a niche none-the-less.

Until 1987.

In 1987 a small, hitherto-unheard-of US-based company called FTL shook the whole computer-gaming market to its foundations by producing an RPG that appealed not just to hard-core RPGers but to game players right across the board. That game was, of course, *Dungeon Master*. And the reason for the game's success was simple - it looked good.

Until *Dungeon Master* most RPGs were simple, crude-looking things. The theory, it seemed, was that RPG fans wanted facts and figures not fancy graphics. And maybe that was so, but this surface complexity denied the games access to the larger market. *Dungeon Master* successfully combined quality 3D presentation with ease of use to draw in the average punter and an underlying game-play complexity to satisfy the die-hard RPG fan.

And once FTL had shown the genre's lucrative potential, the other software developers were not slow to try and catch the sudden wave of popularity. The last few months alone have *seen the* graphically-stunning likes of Core's *Heimdall*, Accolade's *Elvira 2* and, of course, USG's *Beholder 2*, the current ACE benchmark.

Even Origin, who have carried the banner of tradition for Ye Olde Toppe-Downe Viewe for more years than I can remember, have started branching out, with *Ultima VII* employing an isometric-3D view and *The Underworld* utilising modified *Wing Commander* scaling/rotating 3D bitmap routines.

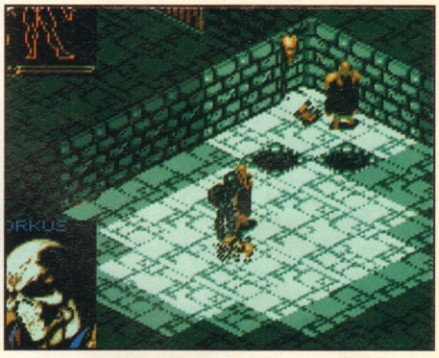
Compare & contrast

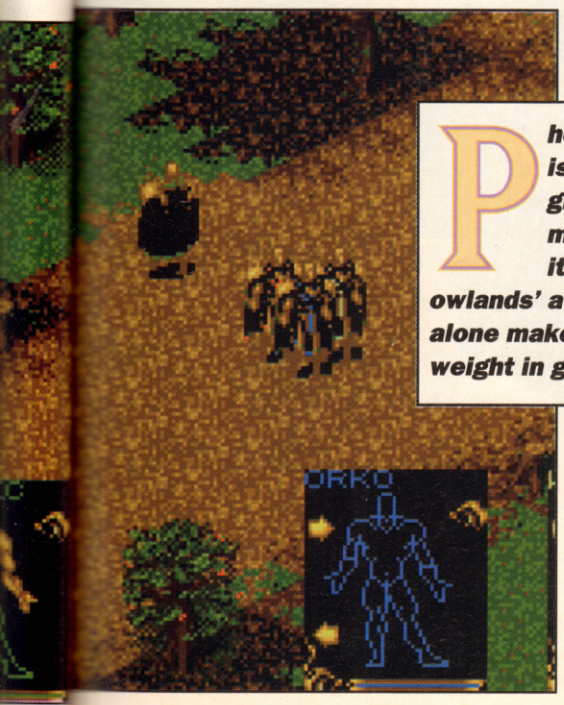
Shadowlands appeal falls somewhere between the graphic heights of Core's Heimdall and the complex conundrums of USG's Eye of the Beholder 2.

While Shadowlands' graphics aren't as eye-popping as Heimdall's, they have a distinct and appealing nature of their own. There's also far more action in Shadowlands with something happening nearly every step of the way. Heimdall, for all its beauty, did have frequent yawnsome longeurs as the player trekked slowly from location to location. The fact that the whole party is on-screen at all times is also in Shadowlands' favour. And for my money the combat, although substantially less awe-inspiring than Heimdall's, is far more immediate, realistic and controllable.

Shadowlands' puzzles and riddles are easily on a par with Beholder 2's. However, the novel Photoscape twist - the light sensors and the like - is refeshing, and the problems where the party needs or is made to split up to solve them add a whole new dimension to play. Where the US Gold games really scores is that it allows the player to converse with some of the characters he meets, albeit in a limited way.

For so competently melding so many existing game elements together - and then adding a few new ones of its own - I've got no hesitation in awarding Shadowlands our highest accolade. Aw, dontcha just know it - Shadowlands is the new ACE Role-Playing Game Benchmark.





Photoscape isn't just some gimmick. The massive boost it gives Shadowlands' atmosphere alone makes it worth its weight in gold.

Now Domark, traditionally seen as the home of the coin-op conversion, is dipping its corporate toe in the RPG waters with Shadowlands. The plot starts grimly. The player has been captured by the arch super-baddy and whisked away to his lair in the evil-infested Shadowlands. There you are brutally murdered. But your spirit lives on! In ethereal form you must guide four brave adventurers sympathetic to your plight as they trek through deep dungeons and arid wastes in search of your bones. Only when they have been recovered do you stand a hope of being reanimated.

The action is viewed in isometric 3D, a style familiar from the likes of the aforementioned *Heimdall* and EA's *The Immortal*. The twist here is Photoscape, an innovative display technique whereby light sources realistically illuminate the area around them. The unlit areas are drawn in a murky dark grey, so that it's still just possible to navigate even without torches.

Thankfully Photoscape isn't just a gimmick. It contributes to the game's success on a number of levels. The massive boost it gives the game's atmosphere alone makes it worth its weight in gold. When your party's desperately weak and you can just make out some unknown creature shuffling through the gloom towards you the tension can be immense.

But Photoscape's effects stretch beyond the visual. Some wall fittings act as light sensors, opening or closing doors and pits depending on the presence or absence of light. Certain monsters are attracted or repelled by light. It's such a unique feature that the solutions to actually quite simple problems seem unfathomable until the player remembers the important role light plays in the game. It all works phenomenally well.

Fortunately the game's developers, Teque London, haven't let their imaginative approach to RPGs begin and end with the Photoscape system.

Before the game starts the player is presented with a pre-set team of characters, each described by four major characteristics ratings; combat,

▶46

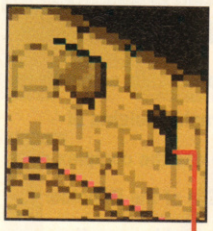
AND THAT'S MAGIC!

Magic is handled rather differently in Shadowlands to other games. The idea is that a mighty wizard forges a spell and casts it onto specially prepared parchment. The spell can then be used by just about anyone - as long as it has been charged with sufficient Magik. Once a spell has been cast it becomes drained of Magik and cannot be re-used until recharged.

Normally spells are cast one at a time, but they can be bound into a grimoire. Each can hold up to six spells. The bearer can then 'cast' the grimoire, and each spell inside is fired off one after the other - a bit like a Magik machine gun!

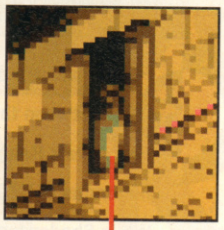
Magik is like the Force. It is innate to all living things. The warriors can absorb the Magik from things like food and water and then use it to power up a much-needed spell. The side effect of this is that the drained foodstuff or whatever is now useless.

Shadowlands is a complex game. So, to illustrate how it plays we've pieced together most of the demo level from this month's ACE Cover Disk. Not,we hasten to add, out of any spiteful urge to spoil Amiga and ST owners fun, but because it illustrates most of the main game features in a concentrated area. But don't worry. We haven't ruined all the surprises - the final chamber's secrets are left for you to discover for yourselves!



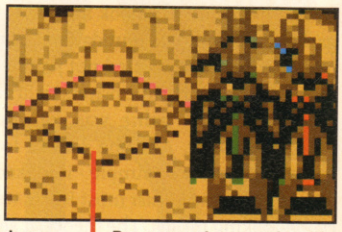
You'll find yourself pulling levers like this on a regular basis to open doors and so on.

Read any nearby signs before pulling a lever - they may give a cryptic clue that the results might not be good!



Hieroglyphics or little shrines (like this one) are mainly for decoration, but they can hint that a non-descript piece of wall is not what it seems...

Keep an eye out for strange-looking wall areas - if you see anything odd then activate a character's hand and feel along the wall. If a brick starts flashing then you know you've found something. Try feeling along the walls if you hit a seeming dead-end - the solution may be right under your nose.



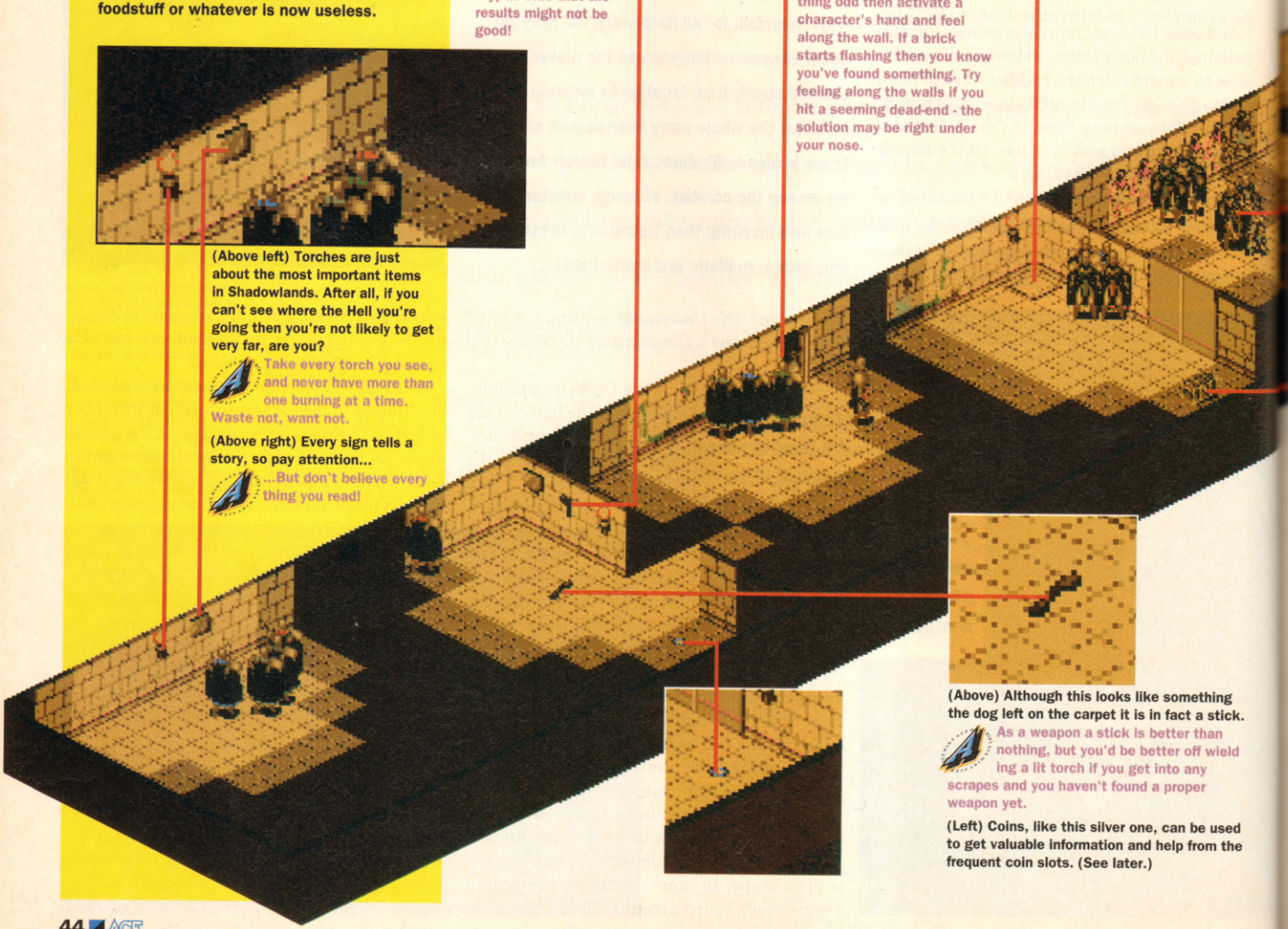
Pressure pads respond to differing weights. While one may activate if a feather is put on it, another may require a whole man's bodyweight to work - a bit of a problem if you've lost one of your party.

(Above left) Torches are just about the most important items in Shadowlands. After all, if you can't see where the Hell you're going then you're not likely to get very far, are you?

Take every torch you see, and never have more than one burning at a time. Waste not, want not.

(Above right) Every sign tells a story, so pay attention...

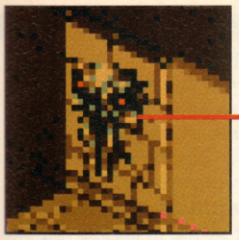
...But don't believe everything you read!



(Above) Although this looks like something the dog left on the carpet it is in fact a stick.

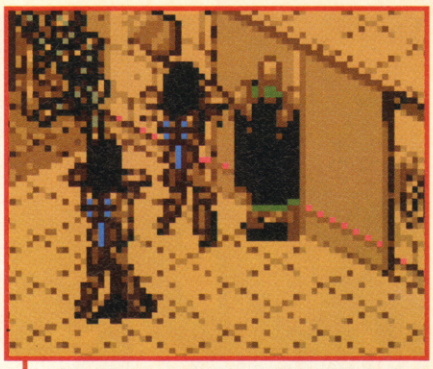
As a weapon a stick is better than nothing, but you'd be better off wielding a lit torch if you get into any scrapes and you haven't found a proper weapon yet.

(Left) Coins, like this silver one, can be used to get valuable information and help from the frequent coin slots. (See later.)



Light sensors like this have a lot of functions. Some cause doors to open or close, others cause pits to appear or disappear, while others may release a gang of monsters.

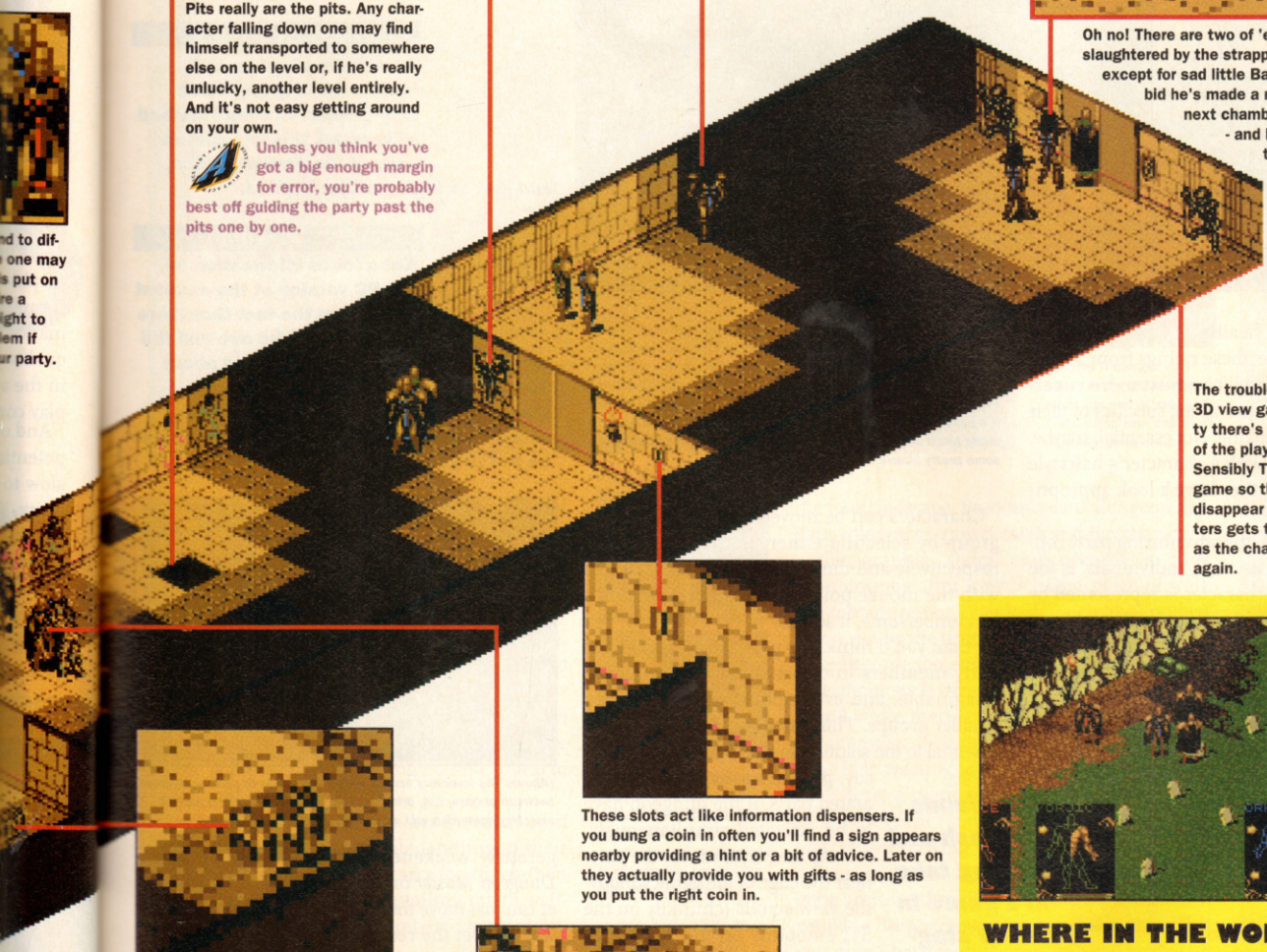
Aaaaaiiiieeeeee!! Who's this? Remember: First impressions can be deceiving. It's not some beefy bloke. It is, in fact, a beefy WOMAN with a veritable exo-skeleton of armour on. And don't think that you'll be able to slip past her by virtue of your charm and style either. She's nasty and she's fast - and she packs a hefty punch. You'll need everyone's help to get rid of her.



Oh no! There are two of 'em! Everyone has been slaughtered by the strapping Amazon types except for sad little Barry. In a last desperate bid he's made a run for the door to the next chamber, only to find it locked - and he hasn't got a key! As the warrior women home in, the chances of Barry's survival look slim indeed... Perhaps you'll have better luck when you play... Shadowlands!

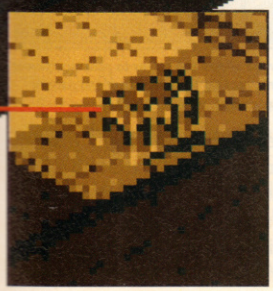
Pits really are the pits. Any character falling down one may find himself transported to somewhere else on the level or, if he's really unlucky, another level entirely. And it's not easy getting around on your own.

Unless you think you've got a big enough margin for error, you're probably best off guiding the party past the pits one by one.



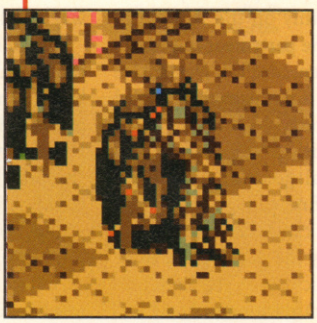
The trouble with these isometric-3D view games is that by necessity there's often a wall in the way of the player's view of the action. Sensibly Teque have written the game so that obstructing walls disappear when any of the characters gets too near, then reappear as the character moves away again.

These slots act like information dispensers. If you bung a coin in often you'll find a sign appears nearby providing a hint or a bit of advice. Later on they actually provide you with gifts - as long as you put the right coin in.



Chests can contain up to six smaller items. Generally speaking the more valuable the contents the harder you'll have to fight for them. Although they weigh a fair bit, they're a good way of increasing the amount of stuff you can carry because they only take up one of your valuable inventory windows.

Although each warrior's rucksack can carry quite a bit o' kit, you'll soon find yourself running out of space. Always remember to discard spent torches, and eat food and drink water when the warriors need it to release vital storage space.



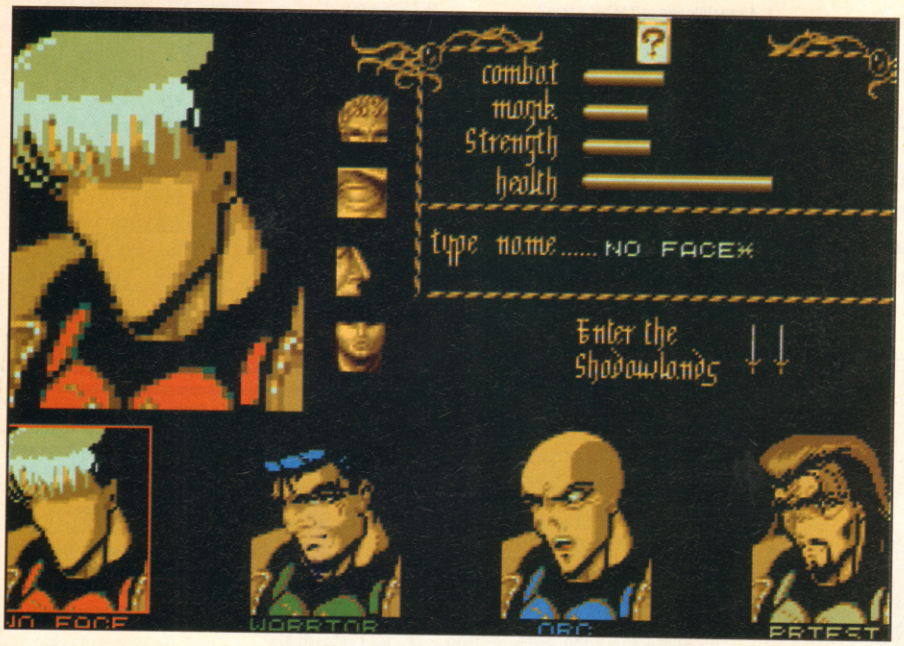
Eeeek! I want my mummy! And here she is, by gum! At last the warriors get a chance to practice their sword-wielding skills. (Actually they're holding sticks. Oh dear.)

The best tactic for dealing with a monster is to send every one in, swords flashing. Tougher monsters, however, may require a more 'hit and run' approach.

WHERE IN THE WORLD AM I?

The bold adventurers' travels take them through four very varied landscapes. It all starts off above ground in a small wooded clearing. It's a haven for vicious ravens but provides a good chance to stock up on fruit that litter's the clearing floor.

A bit of exploring reveals a stair passageway down into a miserable grey dungeon, which is where the real problems start and the Photoscape system really kicks in. Much later the warriors find themselves above ground again in a Hampton Court-style maze, inside an Egyptian-style pyramid and finally exploring a series of ominous dark caves, the home of the evil wizard who killed the player and the resting place of your bones!



(Above) Before entering the Shadowlands the player is given the opportunity to rejiggle each warrior's vital statistics. Although the proportions of each varies, the overall total remains roughly the same, so it's near-impossible to have a character who's brilliant in every respect. By clicking on the icons next to the large portrait it's possible to change the character's hairstyle (you can even make him a slaphead), eyes, nose and chin/mouth. You can get some pretty bizarre combinations, believe me!

43▶ magik, strength and health. The player has the opportunity 'reshuffle' these ratings from a character customiser, as well as adjust more superficial character details such as the specifics of their appearance and their name. Not essential, maybe, but it's fun to tinker with a character's hairstyle and lip shape so that they have a look appropriate to their ratings.

As mentioned above, the adventuring party consists of four individuals. And 'individuals' is the key word here. Each character is represented by its own sprite in the Shadowlands gameworld and a corresponding colour-coded portrait displaying the character's figure in outline, a health bar and any items currently held.

These portraits are the key to controlling the characters. The body outline is split into five regions; head, the two arms and the two legs. By highlighting the regions with the mouse pointer and clicking on areas in the gameworld the player can perform a huge range of functions.

Characters can be made to read a sign by selecting the head and then clicking on the notice board. Toggling a switch is achieved by highlighting the right arm and then clicking on the lever. Other, more complex actions can be performed just as easily. Teque have obviously spent a lot of time thinking it all out and it has been time well spent - it's a wonderful, friendly and flexible interface that works a treat.

Even better is the fact that the characters can be ordered to do several different things at the same time, so while one is pulling a lever, another may be picking up a sword and the other two could be smashing in some skeleton's face. And indeed there are times where this sort of co-ordinated approach to the team's efforts is vital to the player's success.

Shadowlands is a fresh and exciting take on a genre in risk of stagnating due to the play-it-safe proliferation of Dungeon Master clones.

Characters can be moved individually or in a group by selecting either the right or left leg respectively and then 'dragging' the characters with the mouse pointer. Although it sounds a bit cumbersome, it actually works a whole lot better than you'd think. It's possible to arrange the party members into just about any formation imaginable, and even split them up into two smaller groups. This latter ability is sometimes essential to the solution to some problems where, say, pressure pads in widely separated parts of the dungeon have to be activated simultaneously.

As the player moves the party near the edge of the game window the view scrolls (chunkily on the ST, smoothly on the Amiga) to position the party near the centre of the screen. Ideally it would have been nice if the party had stayed centre-screen at all times, but I suspect this was impossible from a technical point-of-view. As it stands the system works fine, though waiting for the scroll to do its thang can become annoying after a while. Fortunately the player can centre the view at any time by clicking on the right button, which speeds things up immensely.

Combat is as elegantly handled as every other aspect of the game. To attack a monster the player simply puts a weapon in the character's hand, highlights the arm and then clicks on the enemy. No muss, no fuss. Because each character can be dealt with individually, there's no need for the whole party to flee if one of its members is dangerously weakened during the fight (like in *Dungeon Master* or *Beholder*). Instead, the player can just move the troubled player out of harm's way and let the rest get on with the scrapping.

This ability to split the party up permits a whole range of combat methods that just aren't possible in other RPGs. The player can opt for any mode of fighting from a straight all-out scrap, with everyone pitching in, to a sneaky guerilla-style war, sending in lone warriors to strike a couple of blows then bringing them out again.

Now an RPG wouldn't be an RPG without magic. And Shadowlands has a veritable witches' coven of it. Spell casting is handled in a way that'll be familiar to players of *Dungeon & Dragons*. Each spell is written on a piece of parchment 'charged' with magic force. When cast (in a manner similar to combat) the spell's energy is drained and it cannot be cast again until the player 'recharges' it using the magic force contained within other items, like food and so forth. The player thus has to juggle the party's hunger for

Amiga version

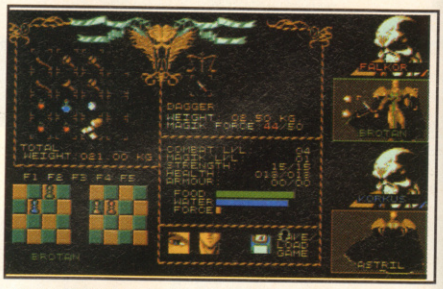
The graphics are small but perfectly formed, and even on a standard TV the items are all fairly recognisable. The scrolling is Amiga-owner-satisyfingly silky, but I personally would have preferred to sacrifice smoothness for speed. The sampled sound is sparse but effective. Owners of 1Mb machines have less disk accessing to endure, but since this only happens when the player moves between dungeon levels it's no great boon.

ST version

Apart from chunkier but faster scrolling and some chip-generated sound instead of samples this is a carbon copy of the Amiga version, and just as highly recommended.

PC Version

Not a lot of information on the PC version at the moment apart from the fact that there will definitely be one and it'll be appearing around about September time. It's unlikely that the gameplay will change much, although chances are the 256-colour VGA palette will be put to good use.



(Above) The inventory screen allows the player to pass equipment between players, eat, drink, recharge spells, adjust the party's marching formation and, of course, save and load games.

I CAN SEE IT IN YOUR FACE

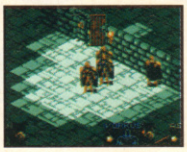
The inset character portraits main function is to provide a control panel from which the player can control each of the four warriors simply and quickly. The player switches between each character by simply clicking on the relevant portrait with the mouse pointer. However, they also provide a secondary function as an excellent 'at-a-glance' indication of the status of each warrior and where they are, depending on the picture in the frame.

This is the portrait type you'll see most of the time (unless you're a spectacularly bad player). By selecting the various body areas you can make your warrior do just about anything!

When a warrior is far from the one currently selected the portrait turns into this full-face shot to indicate that if you go into group walk mode this character will be too far away to follow.

This character isn't just far away, he's on another level altogether. If this appears when you're trying to navigate around some pits then you'll know one's come a cropper.

Whoops! Careful with that cleaver, madam! This character really is a long way away now, and he's somewhere that you can never reach him. Yup, he's a dead 'un!



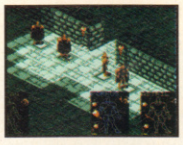
(Above) It can get very lonely in the Shadowlands, when the rest of your party is dead and your one torch is slowly going out...

food with the need to have a set of fully-charged spells.

Spells are amongst the rarer treasures to be found littering the dungeons. Generally such meaty valuables are protected by a particularly mean nasty or hidden behind a secret panel. Lesser goodies, like food or copper coins, tend to be more accessible and can often be found just lying neglected in darkened corridor corners (though the thought of munching on an apple left on some wet stone flooring doesn't appeal to me much).

Each character can carry a King's ransom in booty, the precise amount depending on their individual strength. If they carry too much then they'll start to slow down, entailing much waiting about for the more encumbered party members to catch up.

Shadowlands isn't perfect by any means. Despite



(Above) The importance of being able to split up the party is illustrated by this simple puzzle. The doorway won't open unless someone is standing on each of the four pressure plates.

(Below) A grave situation! The party has found the moss-covered entrance to the dungeon.

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the four landscape 'flavours' - dank dungeon, verdant wilderness, musty caves and Egyptian crypt - the graphic styles can become a little monotonous after a while. One piece of wall, Photoscape or not, does look much like another. However, by the time this ennui has set in you'll have become too engrossed in the adventure to care about such trifles.

And while there are plenty of different-looking monsters, they are all roughly man-sized. You can't help wishing there were a few real monster monsters, a giant fire-breathing Dragon or a mighty Wyvern - something to cause really serious trouser dirtying.

Some non-combative interaction wouldn't have gone amiss, either. Just once during the game it would've been refreshing to meet something that you didn't have to duff over. In Shadowlands it would appear the Art of Conversation is dead.

But then you can't have everything. And to complain too loudly over these points when Shadowlands offers anyone remotely into dungeoneering so much more than most other RPGs is churlish to say the least. Shadowlands is a fresh and exciting take on a genre in risk of stagnating due to the play-it-safe proliferation of *Dungeon Master* clones. Admittedly Shadowlands draws a fair - and at times blatantly obvious - amount of inspiration from FTL's game and many others besides, but the end result is far more than the sum of its parts. And any game that got me so engrossed that I missed *New Baywatch* has got to be good.

● **David Upchurch**

RATINGS

ACE IDEA

ACE TRAILBLAZER

You can cut the mood-laden atmosphere with a knife!

Dungeon Master roots are a little too obvious at times.

The flexible user interface is incredibly friendly.

Some interactive NPCs would have been nice.

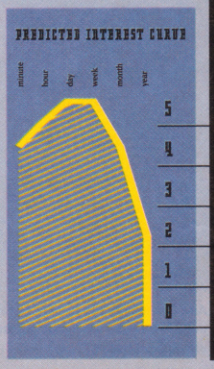
Massive game task with well-graded difficulty curve.

Shame there are no really big monsters.

923 AMIGA/ST RATING

G 9 IQ 7 A 5 FF 9

The first level is a breeze - a nicely-judged tuition in the game's controls and techniques. But it soon gets much nastier, both in terms of the bad guys and the puzzles. And that's when the sharp-fanged monster that is addiction starts to get its teeth into you. And then it's no sleep 'til dawn for you, my lad! The blend of brain bending and monster mashing has been carefully thought out, and the result is a superb game that will drag any RPG fan kicking and screaming through its fourteen massive levels. And even when it's all over you'll still hanker for more. Any chance of a data disc, Domark?



SHADOWLANDS RATINGS

Genre Adventure
Publisher Sierra
Developer In House
Price £39.99

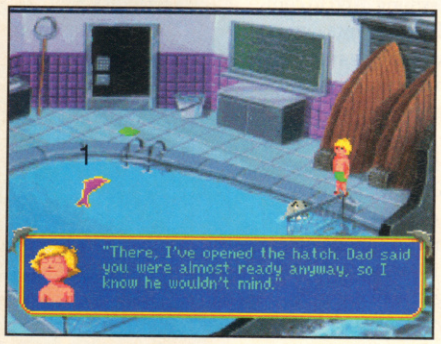
ECO QUEST
THE SEARCH FOR CETUS

Realisation slowly dawns. The world is finally waking up to the grim reality that the awful stories peddled for years by these gloom-mongering scientists are actually true. The planet's self defence mechanism *is* set to collapse. There *is* a hole in the ozone layer the size of

Nebraska and unless we all lay off the rainforests and stop sawing the pipes off old fridges, we *will* all choke to death and fry in the sun's unattenuated rays.

But hey! It's not too late. There's still time to save the planet if we can educate ourselves in ways to be more sparing with our natural resources and more careful with our waste.

Unsurprisingly, it's American based Sierra On-Line Inc who are among the first software publishers to leap onto the ecological bandwagon.



And this is how the trouble begins. Adam releases his talking dolphin into the world and a host of crazy eco-orientated adventures begins!

Distinct from a simply "themed" ecological game, however, Eco Quest is the real deal. All the packaging and instructions for the game are printed on recycled stock using vegetable inks and a water-based coating, the game is aimed at the entire family unit, ensuring - I guess - greater potential penetration for the message. And a share of the proceeds from the sale of each copy of the game will be donated to the Marine Mammal Centre, California.

There's even a free 55 page book given away with the game giving hints and advice on easy ways the owner can help save the planet themselves.

Historically, perfectly decent games emitting even the merest whiff of an educational slant have been leapfrogged in the charts by utter rubbish free of such stuffy pretensions. So it's a brave move of Sierra's design team to produce a game which hasn't been cheapened or tarted up in any way. This game tells you how to think and what to do, and its pleased to do so.

Fortunately, the crossings of the line between gentle instruction and rabid preaching are relatively few and far between and perhaps against all the odds, the game still manages to boast many of the positive aspects of "regular" Sierra releases even with a hefty Message in tow.

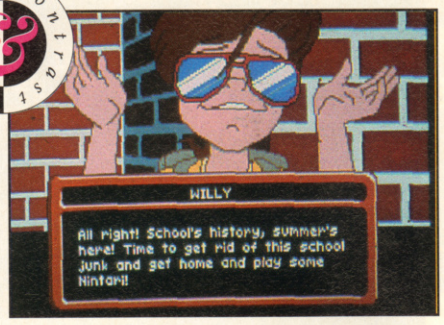
(Top) Eeurgh! No-one said anything about having to get your hands dirty. Eco Lesson Number One - being drenched in crude oil is bad for birds' feathers.
(Above) A million miles away from his dull ordinary life, Adam gets to visit thrilling locations like The Fish Apartments.

Despite the new angle, Eco Quest follows the format with which any owners of other Sierra products will be instantly familiar. The player guides his alter-ego through the visually and sonically superb adventure using the mouse to move about and interact with other objects and characters. There are puzzles to solve and scrapes to get into. So Sierra haven't exactly flipped and gone the sandals'n'mung-bean route yet.

A more genuine concern for potential Eco Questers is that the firm do seem to have gone rather overboard with their endeavours to help the game appeal to the younger adventuring audience. That is, they've made the game worryingly easy. But more of that later.

beginners' adventure. For players with an interest in either the ecological theme, or wish to involve their parents/kids in their hobby Eco Quest with its easy problems and interesting angle is an ideal buy. But for adventurers who like cute graphics but need something to get their teeth into, Willy B. wins.

compare & contrast



On the face of it, Eco Quest and Willy Beamish are very similar games. But woe betide the adventurer who makes the mistake of buying one after the other, thinking that he's going to end up with adventures which are in any way alike. Willy Beamish is an interactive comic, while Eco Quest is a family or

Son of a bearded marine biologist do-gooder, Adam Greene (oh, please) is a pint-sized publicity machine for the ecological cause. Not so much educated as brainwashed by his fanatical father (who gets so mad when people drop litter that he "can't see straight") Adam follows his dad around the world learning all about ecological cause and effect, and collecting a healthy brace of right thinking international pen pals along the way. But, hey! - it's not easy being the son of a jet-setting genius. While his dad loves him and he regularly receives letters from a red hot French chick called Natalie (any girl who's first question about your new home is whether or not the locals still hunt whales has got to be a dream, right?) Adam finds it hard to make friends. He's never in one place long enough, you see. Even his dad can't spend as much time with Adam as he would like, what with all these meetings and conferences and things.

Adam's new home; St Julien in The Carribean presents the same old problems. The place may look like a Lunn Polly brochure but it's actually an ecological nightmare, with dangerous oil spills and lots of dolphin-snaring fishing nets. Adam hasn't made any friends yet and his dad has to go out on business. A high-point in Adam's schedule, then, is when his dad suggests he feeds and plays with the dolphin which is recovering from being caught in the nets in the intro sequence. So after a bit of exploration of the first location, cleaning up a seagull covered in oil, putting water in the rat's cage, tossing a can in a recycling box and so on, Adam decides it's time to play with the dolphin.

And after some fishy frolics and a game of frisbee, Adam discovers, to his understandable amazement that the dolphin can speak. And it's here that the adventure really begins. Revealing that his name is Delphineus, the dolphin explains to Adam that the undersea kingdom that is his home is in terrible danger. Cetus, a giant whale who kept order in the kingdom and washed away all the terrible problems caused by man (quite how is uncertain, but never mind) has gone missing. And without their guardian, the little fishes have become very miserable.

So, Delphineus enlists the help of Adam and the pair set off to explore the ocean and find Cetus.

Most of the game takes place in the underwater kingdom, which is remarkably reminiscent of *The Little Mermaid*. Comical fish swim about the lovely sea, singing and dancing and talking in funny accents. Adam must generally follow Delphineus' lead, exploring parts of the kingdom and solving the problems which he comes across.

There are puzzles to solve and scrapes to get into, so Sierra haven't exactly flipped and gone the sandals and mung-bean route yet.

A pleasing part of Eco Quest's set up is that the puzzles are often visual and pretty kinetic. Big stone pillars need to be revolved and locked into place, objects need to be moved from one place to another and pushed into secret slots revealing passageways and the like. Indeed, during certain stages, the game is as absorbing as last month's *Longbow*. But it doesn't always work that well.

The basic incongruity of Eco Quest is the mixture of standard fantasy adventure puzzles and "real" ecological principles. Ecology may all be very well, but it doesn't make for particularly addictive adventuring.

By far the most irritating example of the ecological "puzzles" is the fact that Adam must (if he is to collect a respectable number of points) painstakingly pick up rubbish wherever he finds it and deposit it in his recycling sack. This involves clicking the recycling cursor over every single bit of rubbish on the screen, and watching Adam swim over, collect and bag it. The first time Adam finds himself in a garbage-strewn environment, this is all very well, and there is a definite sense of achievement as the score at the top of the screen flicks up and the PC emits a healthy ping when the final bit of trash finds its way into the sack. However, these rubbish zones occur far too fre-

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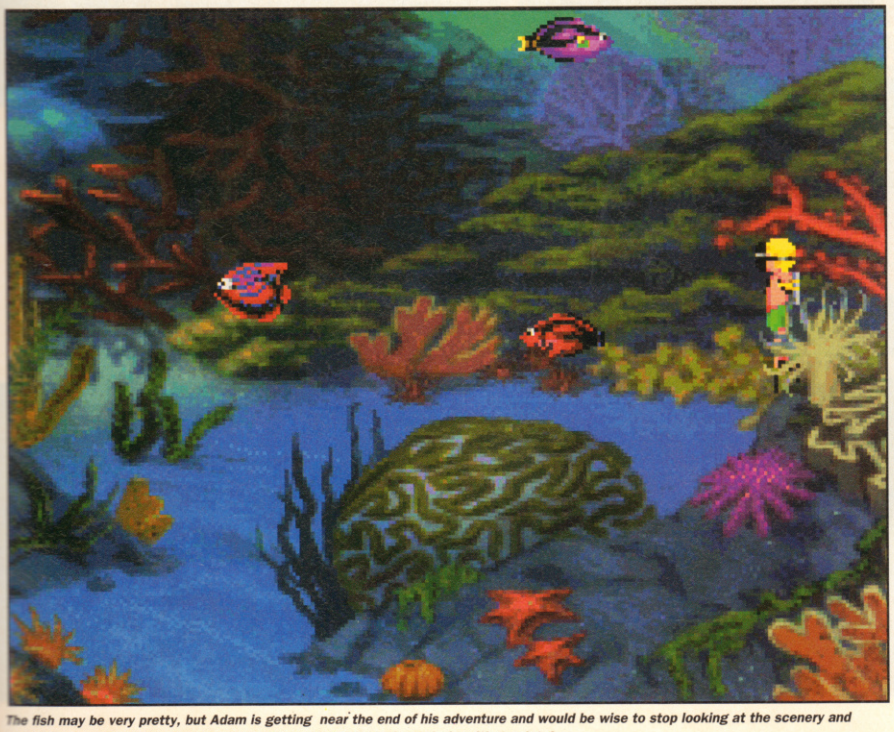


The fish may be very pretty, but Adam is getting near the end of his adventure and would be wise to stop looking at the scenery and concentrate on the job in hand ie; rescuing the Giant Whale Cetus before it's too late!

STEP BY STEP

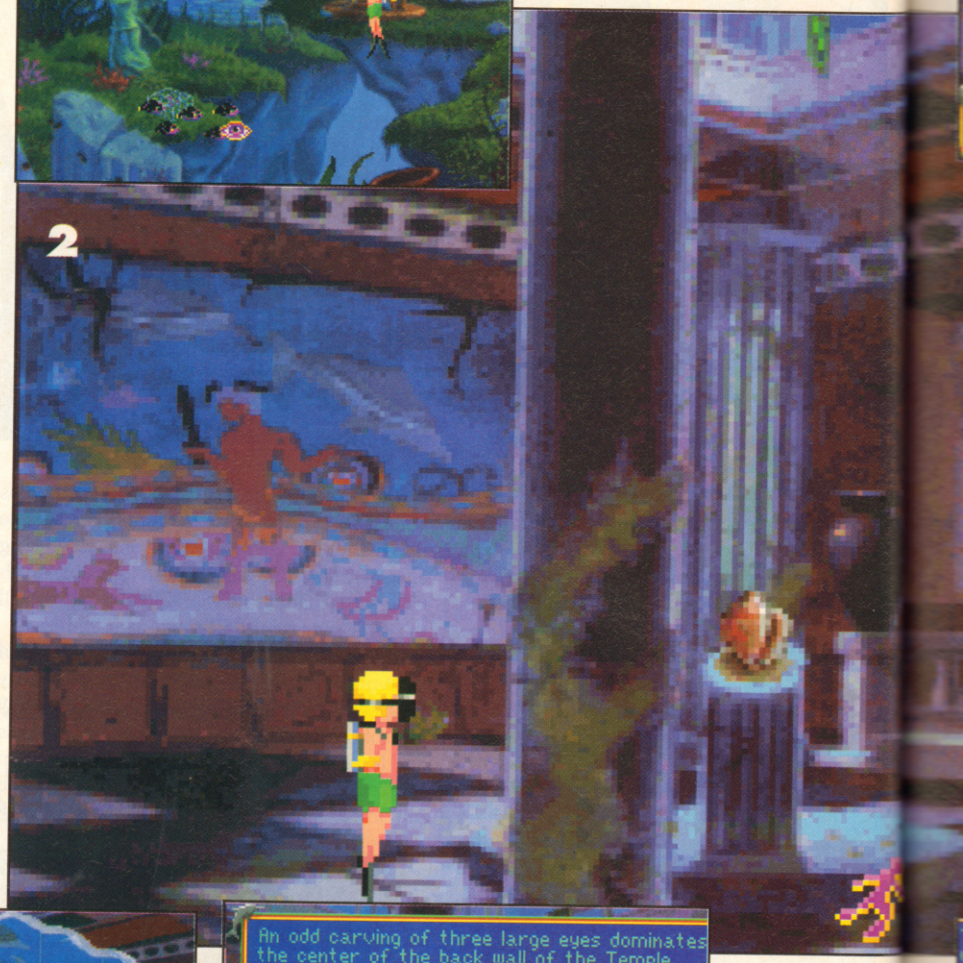
Phew! Underwater adventuring eh? It's a funny old business. And for a little lad like Adam, with his head all full of concerns for the well-being of the planet, it's easy to understand how even the most basic problem can cause more difficulty than normal.

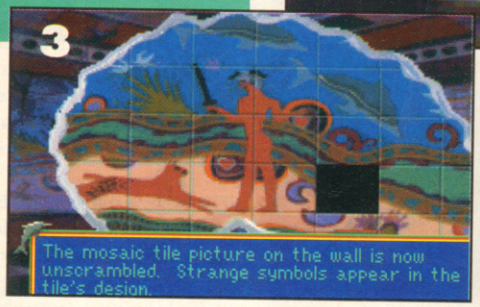
Which is why, as you'll probably already have gathered, we've decided to let you in on one of the more interesting puzzles that Adam has to deal with. If it all seems a little simple, don't blame us. Just remember that this is an adventure for all the family and follow us, as we lead you gently by the hand through an early part of the quest.

Just follow on from one number to the next, and you'll have a good idea of the calibre of mental stress that you'll encounter in the game. Oh, and for those of you easily impressed by the visual nature of Sierra games, we've stuck together one of the few scrolling sections for your delectation.

Here we are in Eluria, undersea kingdom and place in need of a good cleaning up. Adam is in search of information and help, so he should perhaps try and find some on one of the buildings. How about that temple on the right?

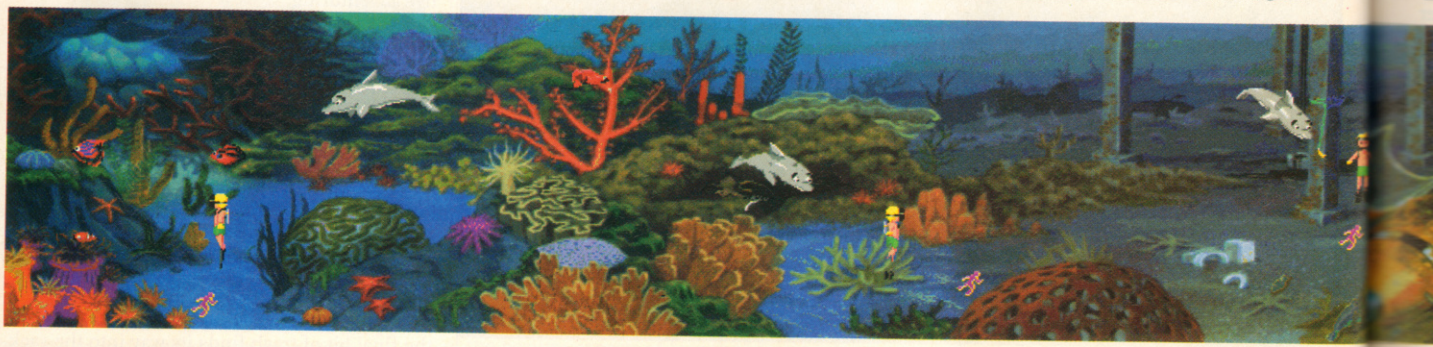
Oooh! Pretty! The inside of the temple is much nicer than the run down outside. Now, what's that on the left wall?





Ha! This sliding block puzzle proved to be no match for me (especially seeing as there is an option to have it automatically solved). Now, what can we make out of this? Perhaps it will come in later. Maybe some character will ask questions relating to shapes in the picture...

Ah, the right side of the temple wall seems to bear some strange symbols. Now, where have we seen a trident before? Ah - the statue outside the temple had one. But how to get it?



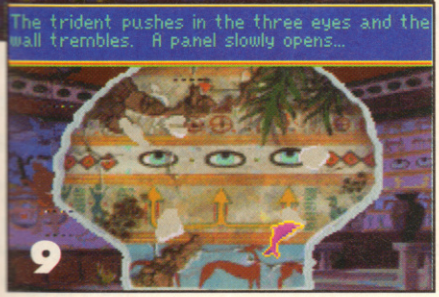
Let's try clicking on the kneeling woman with the shell icon and seeing if anything happens. After all, it's a bronze statue, and the shell is bronze too...

Hooray! The statue loosens his grip and Adam successfully prises the trident from it. Now we can use the trident in the temple.

Ah, a large shell on a pedestal. I'll take it and see if it will come in useful later. But now, we must pop outside and get hold of that trident.

Rollicking adventuring it's not, but an entertaining and visually excellent romp through a beautiful and quirky undersea kingdom it most certainly is. Eco Quest won't keep tough orc-bashers puzzled for long, but it serves its purpose as an ecological storybook and beginners' guide to adventuring very well.

And now the fun can really begin. The fishy friend who Adam has recently summoned from his resting place is willing to give information, but only if Adam can come up with the right answers to some very tricky puzzles. The answers, of course, lie in the sliding block puzzle on the left wall that we spotted earlier on. There's a stroke of luck, eh?



Hooray. In goes the trident and it certainly seems to have done the trick. Just like the caption says, a panel slides open revealing - [illegible] God! A fish! And by the look of the [illegible] well be the oracle!

Now here's a treat for all you deep sea divers out there in adventureland. Much in vogue at the moment is this style of panoramic scene. The only problem here is that there's very little to do except look at the nice graphics, but we thought you'd like to see it anyway.

PC Version

No surprises here. Plenty of disks, a hard drive being an absolute must, beautiful graphics, excellent aquatic music & sound effects and a fab script make this another winner from Sierra.

Amiga version

The big cogs of the Sierra conversion machine are slowly turning and the little conveyor belt at the end is bearing ever fresher Amiga versions of PC originals We're already up to Heart of China, and soon the glorious day will come when there is a simultaneous Amiga and PC release. But it's not quite here yet, so Amiga owners will have to wait a month or so. But we're sure it will be terribly good when it arrives. Watch the Pinks.

ST version

No plans for an ST release as yet, I'm afraid.

49▶ quently, and clearing them up is a drag. But hey! - saving the planet isn't easy. It's hard work. And these sections simulate the fact better than most.

It's the straightforward adventuring puzzles which divert the player's attention away from the occasionally annoying green theme. But even these are pretty bloody easy. There's a section which requires the player to complete a sliding block puzzle before he can progress any further. Unfortunately, so the "young minds" which Sierra are so keen to attract with the game don't find themselves at the end of their legendarily short attention span before the first real puzzle is overcome, an option to have the problem automatically solved pops up.

(Above) The mysterious underwater kingdom of Eluria. But all is not well.

A memory of happier times. Adam plays with his beardy-weirdy dad.

Undersea exploration is anything but easy, and Adam would be wise to make a map in order to avoid further sea-weed searching hilarity.

Now I'm all for making games as friendly as possible, but solving puzzles for the player is going a touch far, I feel. Indeed, the whole game tends to tell the player in rather too much detail what he is expected to do next. "You'd better get your diving gear" warns Delphineus before Adam first ventures into the sea. Examining a nearby cupboard reveals that it's used to store diving gear. No comedy drowning routines here.

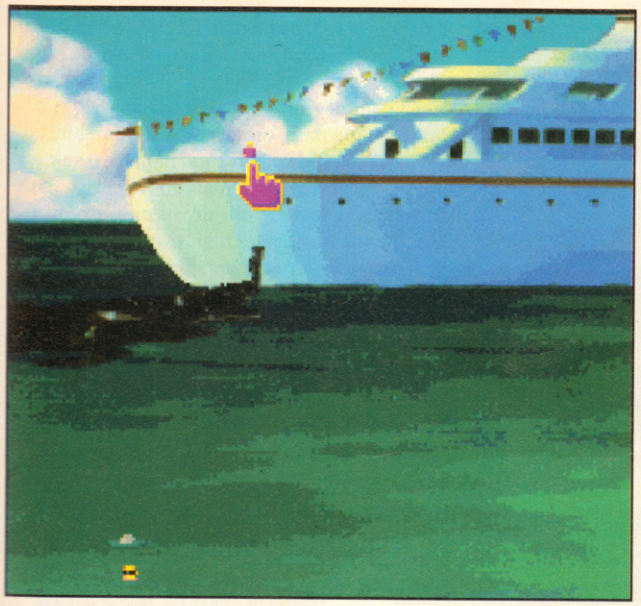
Hardened masters of the genre will find it painfully easy. But that's not really what the game is all about...

Even at the climax of the adventure, the only hostile creature which the player has encountered during the whole game doesn't turn out to be really nasty, but has instead had his brains addled by some toxic nuclear waste dumped into the water or something.

So far as the whole ecology bit goes, I remain unconvinced. The need to perform tasks which do not come naturally in order to be rewarded smacks of laboratory tests on animals, to be honest. At times I felt as if I was being made to run around in goody-goody circles, taking a role in a rather clumsy learning experience which I would rather avoid. While the informative side of the game is fine, all that trash collection got right up my nose.

Mind you, Sierra can honestly claim to be right up there with the greats like Lucasfilm in the scripting stakes. Even at its most trite and senti-

Eluria Town Centre, Saturday night. Having cleaned up the trash which litters the entire screen, Adam sits back and contemplates the good he has done for the environment. But what about that statue just behind him..?



The combination of ecological trudgery and fantasy puzzles seems a little unusual. Here, for example we find Adam collecting all the garbage thrown out of a cruise liner one minute, and preparing to enter into all sorts of mystical magical shenanegins with a bronze statue the next.

WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH!

It's no laughing matter, you know. Planet Earth just can't cope any more, and it's all our fault! We've jumped on one burger carton too many and been less careful than we might with our deodourant. And the summers aren't going to be that pleasant in a few years time. But we can all pull ourselves back from the magnifying-glass treatment by taking some simple steps.

And who could be better equipped to spread the word than computer game manufacturer Sierra? No-one. That's who.

Printed on fully recycled stock, *I Helped Save The Earth* is a fascinating little book enclosed free with Eco Quest. Contained in its pages are fifty - count 'em - five ways that YOU can help save the earth. It may not be as gripping as defending our home from marauding space fiends, but it's a lot safer.

So, in the interests of a cleaner, greener planet, we've selected a couple of tips to share with you.

1. **Cut the rings on six-pack holders! *(So fish don't get caught up in them)***
2. **Don't be an American *(Apparently, they use over 150 GAL LONS of water EACH. EVERY DAY!)***
3. **Don't take your shopping home in bags *(You can maybe put the items in your pockets)***
4. **Pull weeds, don't spray 'em! *(Weed killer is toxic, and hurts animals)***
5. **Come up with your own ideas about saving the earth *(They're probably better than these)***

mental, the dialogue between the characters, especially Adam and Delphineus is streets ahead of 80% of all other games on the market at the moment. And while games for adults would be unlikely to get away with the male lead professing his love for a dolphin, I guess in a kids' adventure, it's okay.

Eco Quest is very much a curate's egg. Ecological fashionability or otherwise aside, it's an example of all that is both good and bad in Sierra's games of late. The presentation is awesome, with simply stunning visuals and an atmospheric soundtrack. The interface, too, is commendably friendly. But, even bearing in mind that this is a game for "young minds" as the packaging explains, it's a bit easy. And sometimes the lengthy periods of action and conversations over which the player has no control end up making him feel more like he's operating the remote control for a slide projector than using his mouse to interact with a responsive program.

It's very much a beginners' adventure, and hardened masters of the genre will find it painfully easy. But that's not really what it's all about. It's a genuinely successful attempt to produce a family game with a message which, although a bit laboured at times, raises awareness of a worthwhile issue without deteriorating into a lecture.

● **Jim Douglas**

Eco Quest is certainly not short on the characterization front. Different sea creatures act and talk in different ways, helping the adventure along and providing relief from the eco-preaching.

RATINGS

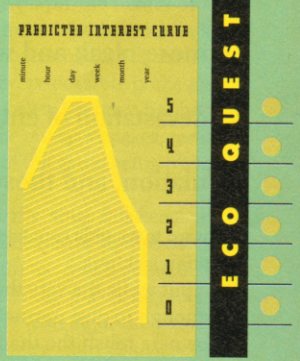
Ecologically sound
Fun for all the family
Flawless presentation

A bit easy
A touch too cute
Eco theme rammed down the throat somewhat

820 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
8	4	8	7

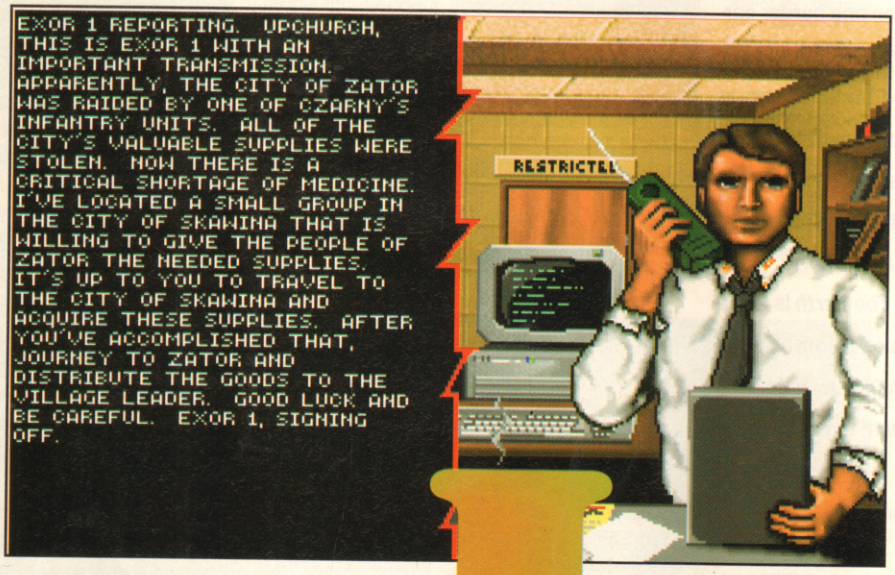
Eco Quest isn't going to keep hardened adventurers playing for that long. It's just too easy. However, as an introduction to the genre, it serves its purpose well, maintaining a high level of interest for the duration of its admittedly short lifespan. Certainly in the early stages, the player is dragged through the puzzles at such a rate that it he wonders if he's ever going to do any thinking for himself. Nevertheless, it looks great and works best when all family members are playing it together.



ECO QUEST RATINGS

Genre Role Playing Strategy War Simulation (Phew!)
Publisher Empire
Developer Paragon Software
Price £34.99

TWILIGHT 2000



It's hard to imagine anything more bleak and wretched than the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust. Total devastation of entire countries, the extermination of vast chunks of the population, and those who aren't incinerated in the blast are left looking for-

ward to roughly equal doses of starvation and radiation sickness.

But while the very thought of such a future is enough to give normal people nightmares, PC owners relish the thought of exploring a post-Apocalyptic wasteland. At least that seems to be the impression Paragon Software have of things, giving IBM gamers the chance everyone has been waiting for to feel what it's like fighting a futile war in a radioactive Hell-hole.

Still, it's only a game, and a reasonably innovative one at that. The latest spin on the 'give everybody everything' angle currently in vogue with software developers seems to be that a game needn't fit into any particular pigeon-hole, and it needn't conform to any set style. The idea is that rather than shoe-horning game elements into a particular presentation style, each should be played in whichever mode is most appropriate.

When your party of soldiers (each with abilities distinguishing them from the others) travel a short distance by foot the world is represented in isometric 3D (like *Cadaver*) while short distance vehicular motion is presented in polygons, and everything else, either long-distance treks from one city to another or operations back at base is handled with click-on icons and maps. So, with no particular presentation style as such, it's clear that Twilight 2000 must rely on the appeal of its premise alone. And the premise is this:

The aftermath of this hypothetical tactical nuclear war is a dark and depressing one. The whole of Europe lies devastated and in Poland, the centre of the ground conflict, scattered troops from all nations wander the ravaged wasteland, fighting for survival. Leaderless and lost, they have forgotten who they are attacking or what they are defending.

However, a fearsome figure emerges with a very clear goal. The megalomaniacal Baron Czarny plans to seize as much of the spoils of war as he possibly can and now, when his targets can offer least resistance, is his ideal time to strike.

Known to have been involved with ultra-harsh police riot squads and implicated in all sorts of grizzly stories of torture and death squads, Czarny is using his influence among the Polish military to assemble his Black Legion. By the time the player comes into the game, Czarny has already seized

control of northern Poland, and is busy running the place like the rabid fascist lunatic he so clearly is.

The player takes the role of the commander of an elite fighting squad of up to twenty men and women, of whom any four can be mobilised for each particular mission. The early stages of the game concentrate on the gradual assembly of enough military weight to successfully win the finale; the showdown with Czarny's Black Legion.

Following a decent if not exactly stunning intro sequence, the game leads the player into perhaps its most important stage; the selection of characters and the division of points for each of their available attributes. This is pretty familiar territory for anyone with more than a passing knowledge of the role playing genre.

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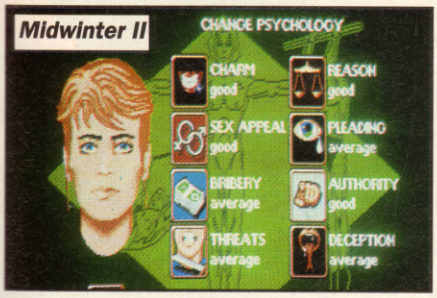
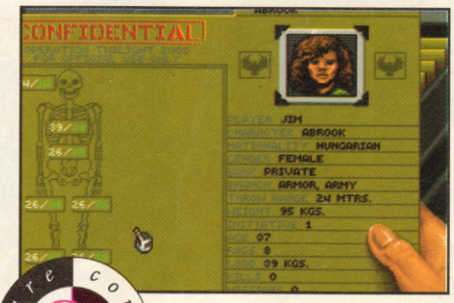
The twenty characters are kept 'on file' at headquarters and drafted into play for appropriate missions. The characters can be either male of female, can originate from any of nine different nations (the accompanying blurb paves the way for this with some nonsense about regiments becoming disbanded and reformed in a hotchpotch of nationalities), and have a set of background skills on top of the regular agility, constitution, charisma, intelligence and education ratings.

The player can then select a pre-war career for each of the characters, giving them the chance to 'learn' skills for themselves. Basically, as a character's career progresses, their initial pool of attributes will be boosted in particular areas depending on what sort of work they do.

Come the outbreak of war, the player must decide which military occupation he wishes each of his twenty prospective soldiers to pursue. The final hurdle to be scaled before the combat can begin (at last) is the selection of Secondary Activities. Here, the attributes are tweaked for the last time simulating the sort of casually acquired skills picked up in everyday life.





Compare & contrast

Midwinter II - Flames of Freedom, out next month on the PC and already a wow on other formats, is about as close a game premise to Twilight 2000 as you can get. Rather than taking place in the aftermath of a nuclear war, however, Midwinter II tells the tale of the battle between the Saharan empire and the Free Earth Federation or something.

Anyhow,the role playing elements are there, with your central character having a brace of abilities and statistic factors to take into account during each encounter. The two points to note are that there's no isometric display in Midwinter, and the 3D is slightly better in Twilight 2000. For players keen to absorb the maximum realism, Twilight is by far the better deal, but it could be argued that Flames of Freedom offers a more entertaining game all round.

Despite these routines being handled in as simple-to-use fashion as is possible with easily accessible icons, there's no getting round the fact that all this attribute attribution is a bloody chore. It would seem to be a blessing, therefore that there's an automatic set-up option enabling the player to construct an entire squad at a stroke. And a very appealing option it is too.

Players should beware of too casual a use of the random set-up feature, though, since vital skills may be missing from the computer-assigned players. The first mission, for example, involves having to speak to a contact in Polish, and my computer-assigned team was game-endingly bereft of anyone who could speak the language. A pre-mission briefing will hint at the requirements for each coming mission, so these frustrations can be generally avoided.

The best compromise is a half-way house of random selection and human approval, with the player being able to reject any dullards while relinquishing the ability to simply magic-up a ready-made team of top combat heroes.

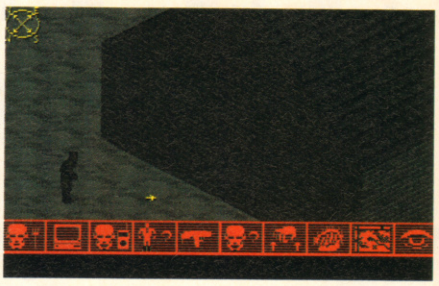
Unusually compared to most of the military strategy games you'll have played, Twilight 2000 doesn't quite afford the player the luxury of an unlimited range of equipment with which to kit out his team. While the stores of the HQ are sufficiently stocked with every possible make and style of firearm and explosive, the team has been left woefully lacking in the transport stakes, resulting in the initial stages of the game being played on foot.

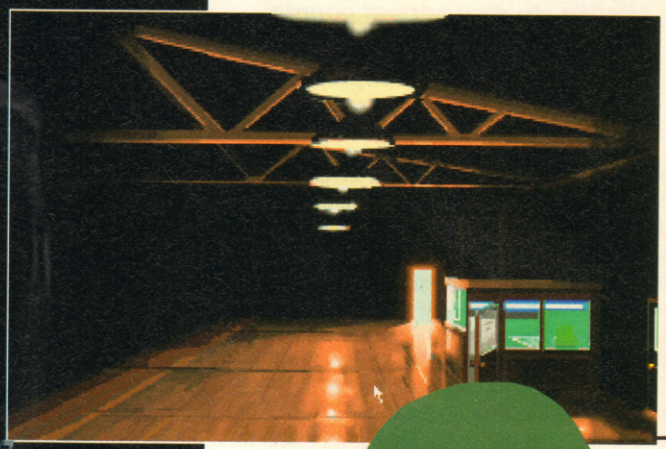
Which is a good job, really, since this keeps the polygons at bay for a while, reducing the risk of swamping the player with too much going on at once. Indeed, even when the player has had a chance to come to terms with all of the game's interface methods, the change from 3D to iso- ▶ 58

(Top) ...*In the stores, in the stores... This rather glamorous representation of thestores situation gives a false impression of the equipment available for the team. The packing crates are all empty, and there aren't any snowshoes in sight.*

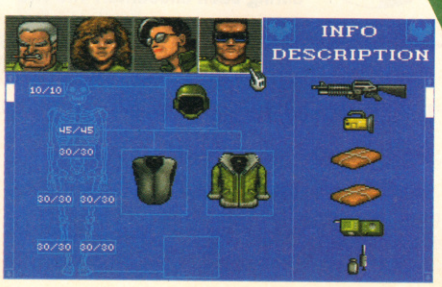
(MIddle) Buildings tend to have their doors on the wrong side. In order to gain access, its best to turn them off, revealing a wire-frame "shell"

(Below) The sadly empty Motor Pool which can thankfully be filled with top of the range military vehicles, generally acquired as reward for successfully completed missions.

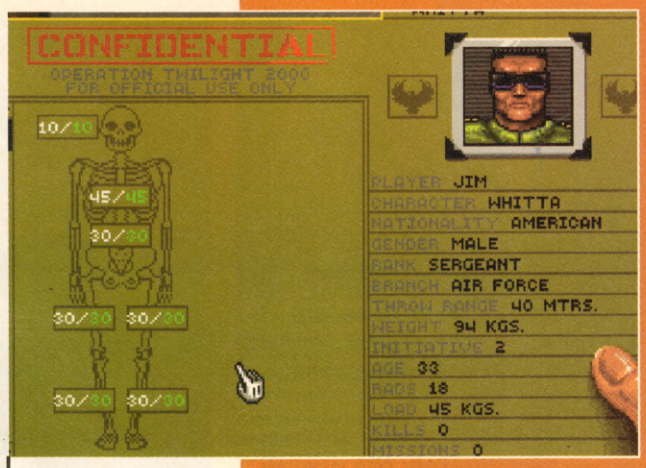




There's a lot of stats in Twilight 2000. The fiendish Baron Czarny may well laugh, but he doesn't know that the team lined up for this campaign has a base hit point score of twenty and are fully fluent in Italian. Ha ha!



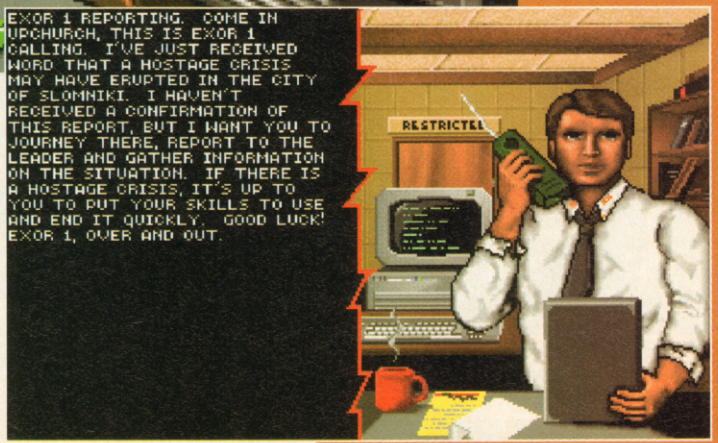
Special Agent Whitta. Skills: undercover penetration, disruption tactics and antagonising enemy troops. Weaknesses: Insobordinate Low resistance to alcohol, struggles with English, low charisma rating.



Two maps feature in the game. The Handheld LCD Mapper (above) and the political wallchart (below) the LCD is used for actual movement "in the field" while the political map represents the current strength of Czarny's forces versus the player's own status.

The general state of play in Poland at any particular moment can be examined on the computer. While Commander Douglas seems to be good at keeping the population up (oo-er) and keeping them fed, he should really concentrate on getting some medical supplies and boosting the population's morale.

All operations back at base are controlled from this lovely office. It's here that new members of a squad can be constructed and assigned. Every major item in the room leads to a new area in the game. Apart from the open window, which quits out to DOS. So with that notable exception, let's take a guided tour...



(Right) It's over the radio that the team will receive information and instructions from the Operations Manager. Basically, at the end of each mission, it's this guy who tells the team what's up next. When he shouts, you jump. There's no time for slacking in post-apocalypse Poland!

(Left) Each recruit is armed with abilities, limitations and equipment of their own. It's best to avoid selecting a character with a low initiative rating as the team leader. Remember to put the weapons in the hands of those you wish to engage in combat, or they'll fight unarmed. Simply *having* a gun doesn't mean they'll use it.

55► metric to plan view maps is a bit much to take in all in one go.

The most central of all screens is the player's office. It's from here that all the other game areas can be accessed. A computer on the desk will yield information as to how the battle against Czarny's forces is going, with possession of cities indicated and a bunch of bar graphs, one of which is the morale graph, indicating how happy the people of Poland are now that their sky is red and full of dust. The radio is your link to your intelligence officer, and the filing cabinet is where all the files of your available troops can be found, while the map gives an overview of the whereabouts of all troops currently in the game.

Unfortunately the overall conclusion is that it doesn't gel together as well as it might.

The missions begin with relatively tight briefs (oo-er) which gradually become more vague as time goes on. The first mission, a doddle, is to travel to a place called Skawina, find some urgently needed medical supplies and then deliver them to the head honcho in another town. If successfully completed, this mission will yield a personnel carrier which will help the team move around at a better lick.

Although basic, this first outing helps the player come to grips with the control interface well enough, ensuring that he encounters, although at a pretty basic level, most of the types of situations his team will have to deal with later in the game.

As the game goes on, however, the details available from headquarters include rather general advice like "search the area" and "investigate reports of trouble", encouraging the player to see what's going on for himself.

During the missions the characters can be instructed to forage, fish, fight and talk with other characters in the game. However, apart from object handling, it's not possible to treat the characters as individuals. It seems that all the abilities and skills are simply pooled into an average overall ability in all areas. The result is that the death of a character affects the ability of the team, but doesn't really feel as if it matters that much. Most role playing games on the market today allow a team to be split and the individual members to move around and carry out sub-missions for themselves. Not here.

PC Version

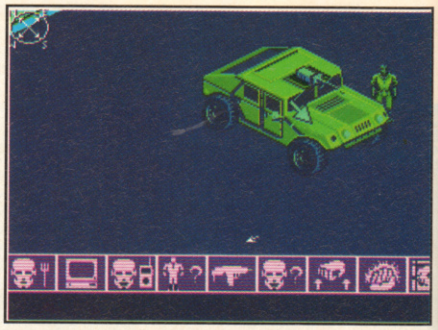
PC Owners are about as responsive an audience as is possible for Twilight 2000. They haven't, as yet, been spoiled by arcade action and (if the figures put around by marketing companies are to be believed) are of an appropriate age range to deal with the grim plot and mass of numbers. Whatever, it's the PC that the game was developed on, comes on five disks and works about as well as any other.

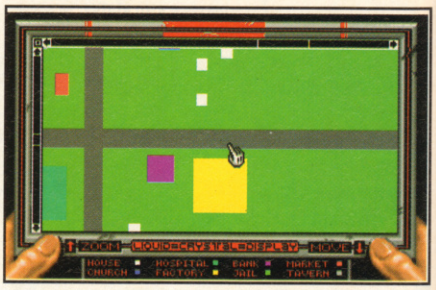
Amiga Version

Amiga owners can look forward to a version of Twilight 2000 during the summer, and aside from it maybe coming on even more disks, it'll be exactly the same.

ST Version

The ST version, as we understand it, is still a long way off completion, and we'll be keeping readers abreast of its progress as details become available.

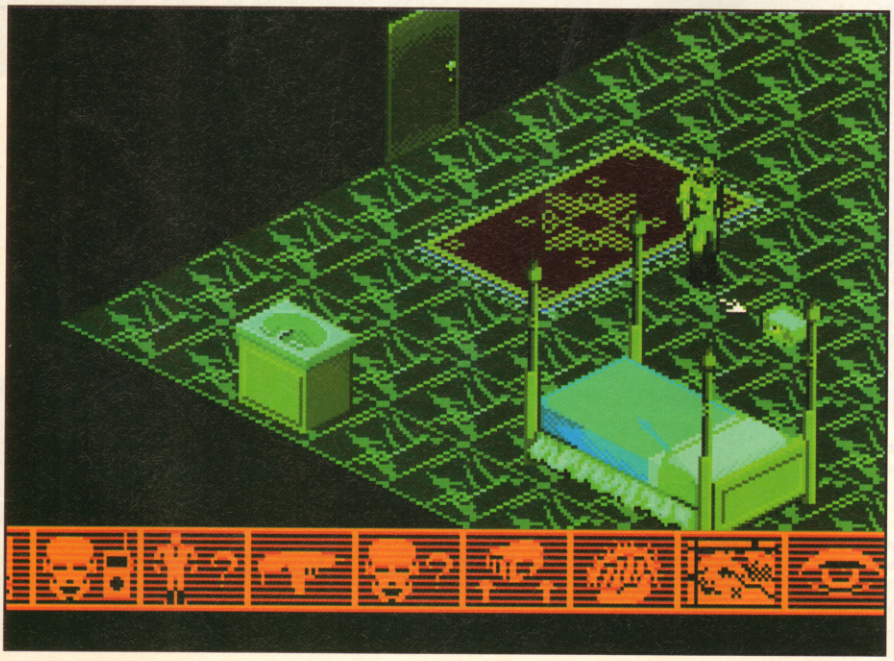




(Top) Transport without a vehicle is a depressing affair. Thankfully, the reward for completing the first mission successfully is an armoured personnel carrier, allowing the player access to all manner of polygon treats.

(Above) The LCD Mapper in action - the yellow square is your home base.

(Below Left) Look at those sheets, Upchurch! Call those hospital corners?! And your uniform is a mess. You're a bloody shower!



Many of today's top polygon programmers would be wise to examine Paragon's polygon routines, however. This section of the game is pretty excellent, and could well have made a stand alone product of its own. It's in the 3D stages that Twilight 2000 begins to shape up and look like it has some balls.

However, just when the player is finding himself thoroughly absorbed in a problem, Twilight 2000 has the habit of bringing him back down to earth with a bump, and this is nearly always a result of the game's role-playing origins or slightly unfriendly design quirks. The 3D isometric view, in which the most interesting parts of the game are played (such as conversing with other characters and hunting for objects), is the least convincing of the lot. For a start, the team of four soldiers is represented by a solitary figure who moves in ugly jerks across a bare-bones landscape. The screens update in clumsy flicks only when the player actually moves off an edge, making it impossible, in effect, to see where he's going.

Movement is frequently prohibited while on the map screen because, the player is informed, there

(Above) The team's home town of Krakow. The first mission involves a trip to Skawina in the south to scout for medical supplies.

(Left) The motor pool looks sadly empty at the start of the war against Czarny.

are enemy soldiers in the area. However, the same movement while in the isometric view is permissible.

Combat is also a frustrating affair, with annoying little messages popping up reporting that an enemy soldier has fired a particular weapon, has hit/missed one of your party and inflicted 'X' points of damage while all the time you're flicking through your inventory screens and getting a member of the team to hold and use his weapons. The messages can be turned off, but since the enemy fire at you from off the screen, everything becomes a bit of a mystery, but leaving them on and handling the combat yourself is really annoying, like having someone digging you in the ribs all the time.

A further frustration is the fact that buildings frequently have their doors on the northern (blind) sides, forcing the player to toggle them 'off' in order to see how to gain entry.

But eventually, the good points outweigh the bad. The 3D polygons for vehicular transport are simply superb with an above average level of detail for buildings and scenery, and combat in this mode is entertaining and exciting. Indeed, it's perhaps the quality of the polygons which make the isometric sequences look so unpolished.

Twilight 2000 deserves a round of applause, at the very least, for taking on the unenviable task of trying to combine a variety of games styles in one. However, the overall conclusion is that it doesn't gel together as well as it might. For a player especially keen on the idea of exploring and dominating a post-holocaust Europe and who is willing to forgive some rough edges for the privilege, it's worth more than a cursory glance.

● **Jim Douglas**

CONFLICTING VIEWS

Depending on which particular stage of the game the player finds himself in, his view of the world will change accordingly. During most missions, there will be a change of viewpoint every couple of minutes. In the most heated situations, the player will be required to drive a polygon personnel carrier using 'real-time' cursor controls, explore a traditional isometric RPG landscape using the mouse to control the movement of his character and negotiate vast areas of countryside using a handy LCD map alone. While it's true that real soldiers need some advanced multi-tasking capacity, this continual switching between interface views and styles is really a bit much.

RATINGS

Plenty of variety.	Too much chopping and changing?
Lots of hit points for stickers.	Clumsy isometric mode.
Great 3D.	Plot is a downer

800 PC RATING

G	IQ	A	IT
7	5	6	6

Twilight 2000 takes time for you to appreciate it, and the rewards are there. The war against Baron Czarny is a long and demanding one, and there are no short cuts to success. Instead, the missions and battles must be played through at each stage. The result of this apparent slog is a realistic sense of achievement each time a victory (no matter how small) is achieved. The biggest concern is the amount of time a non-RPG fan will relish spending jerking around the undeniably unsophisticated isometric landscape on which much of the game is actually played.

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE

minute hour day week month year

5
4
3
2
1
0

TWILIGHT 2000 RATINGS

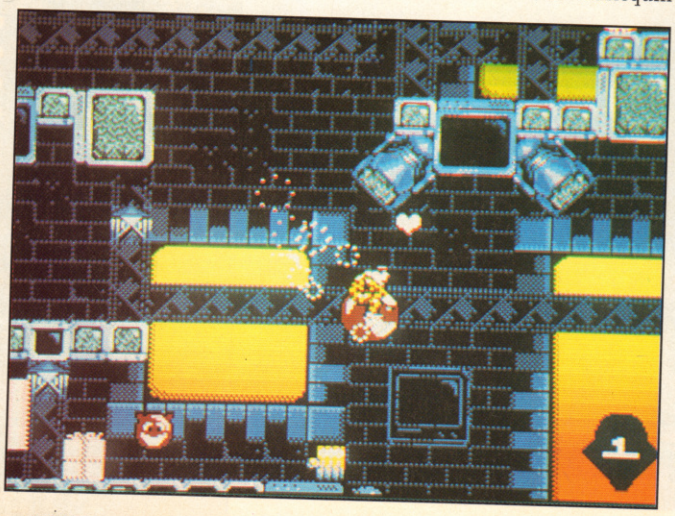
Genre Platform Game
Publisher Gremlin
Developer The Warp Factory
Price £25.99

HARLEQUIN

However death and destruction-orientated the majority of today's arcade-based software may have become, it's nice to see that it's still possible to base exhilarating games around non-violent, almost girly themes. Take the Harlequin, for example. Anybody who covers their face in make-up and wears a frilly pyjama suit not unlike

Andy Pandy's would hardly sound like the ideal hero for a bells-and-whistles platform extravaganza. But hero he is, and a surprisingly hard one at that. In Gremlin's latest arcade effort - and undoubtedly their most impressive to date - the diamond-clad central character comes across as one of the most athletic game stars since the Prince of Persia or the great Sonic himself.

In a nutshell, what we're dealing with here is a cross between RoboCod and Gods. Harlequin makes very little effort to disguise the fact that these two platform favourites have obviously been important influences, but the sheer excellence with which it manages to pull off a successful marrying of the two game styles makes this pretty much forgivable.



If, after looking at the screenshots here, the player still has any doubts about the "Watch With Mother" look and feel of Harlequin need only read the scenario to have any such doubts extinguished utterly. Apparently the Harlequin has returned home (from the shops, perhaps? Why are such important details always left out) to find his land in a state of disrepair (sic). It may sound slightly dodgy, but the idea is that Harlequin actually lived inside a giant clock cum palace called Chimerica. Now the giant main doors are barred and a sign on the giant clock reads "Out of order due to broken heart." So, to restore peace and harmony to the land, Harlequin's got to search Chimerica's giant lands - all 23 of them - and recover the four pieces of said broken heart which have been scattered to the four winds.

Okay, okay, so it's not exactly The Grapes of Wrath - but then John Steinbeck couldn't write a decent scrolling routine, so it all sort of levels out in the end. If your knowledge of Harlequins ends with the Rugby team and the rather nice Terry's chocolate assortment (previously Neapolitans),

you won't know that Harlequins are in fact more than just namby-pampy silky boys in baggy trousers and a Dick Turpin hat. In fact they are endowed with bizarre magical powers, which accounts for the game's mythical, almost surreal graphical style.

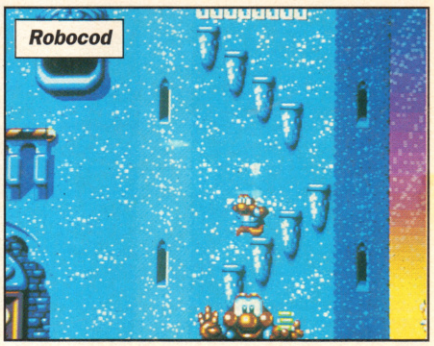
Harlequin's progress around the Chimerica world is charted by a giant map of the game area which appears before each level with helpful "YOU ARE HERE" arrows. Generally the route taken seems to be specified by the program, with one level leading automatically to the next, but more thorough players will find that by experimenting with switches and the like, portals can be opened to alternative levels, allowing the player to go through the game via a number of different routes. Whatever the deal, the objective for each individual level remains the same throughout - get to the exit.

It is of course a far trickier task than that rather potted summing-up may suggest - the very nature of the huge, eight-way scrolling levels makes them difficult to negotiate. It's not that the levels and platforms have been designed in a particularly nasty fashion - well, they have, but that's not really the point - it's the landscapes' sprawling, open-plan style a la RoboCod that creates the main challenge. It's easy enough just to get lost, as there's no definite route to follow, with any number of ways to get from A to B. It's a little daunting at first, to the point of instilling a sense of agoraphobia and being perpetually lost, but things soon sort themselves out as soon as the player orientates himself and gets a feel for where things are. Actually, this sprawling level design isn't entirely my bag as I'm a lazy gamesplayer and can't stand having to find my own way through big landscapes - I much prefer to have a few helpful arrows dotted around here and there to point me at least more or less in the right direction.

Harlequin's diamond-clad central character comes across as one of the most athletic game stars since the Prince of Persia or the great Sonic himself.

I was surprised, therefore, to find that I was nowhere near as frustrated or put off by Harlequin as my first few minutes of watching someone else play it suggested I might be. Though there are plenty of times when there doesn't seem to be a way forward or you're just plain lost, the game always manages to compel the player to find the solution. It's mostly due to the fact that, on a basic arcade level, the game never lets up. Wherever Harlequin may be, it's a good bet that some trap or energy-sapping minion will be after him. It may be something as simple as a dripping tap or elaborate as a giant flying snake, but there are virtually no safe havens within the game, and, as a result, virtually no time to sit still.

Though Harlequin is first and foremost a platform game, it does boast arcade adventure elements. The most important one is the important part that switches play in the game - every level has a few dotted around the landscape, and they perform different tasks when thrown. A switch may unlock a door or exit, put a platform in ▶72



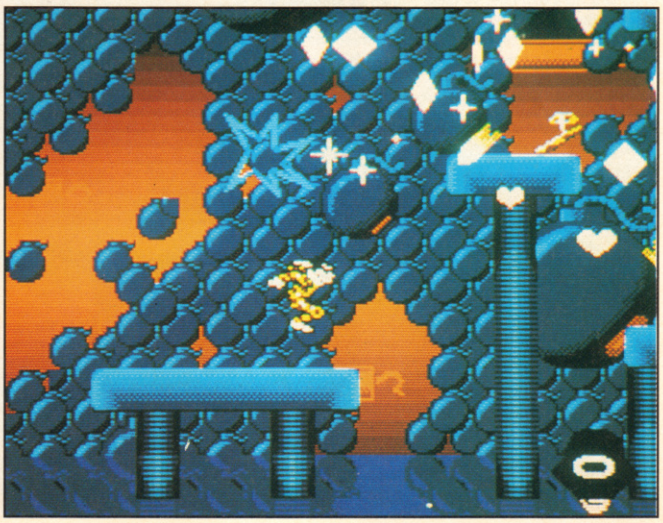
Compare & Contrast

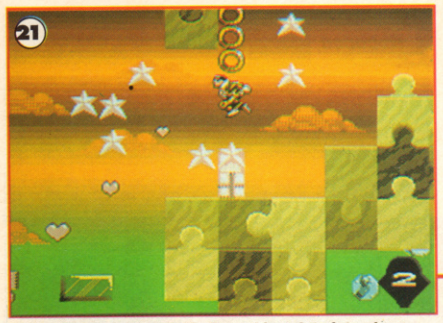
Comparing Harlequin to any one game directly is not an easy task - primarily because it's more like a mish-mash of elements from many other platform products. The best description is a cross between Robocod and Gods. Initially it seems more like Robocod than anything else, but this just proves that first impressions can be deceiving, as the only real similarity is the huge high-speed eight-way scrolling play areas. Harlequin has far more sophisticated character control, and this combined with the arcade adventure aspects makes it a lot like Gods in that respect. At a push, I'd say that Harlequin's greater variety makes it slightly more rewarding than Robocod, even though a lot more effort is required to get into the game. So far as Gods is concerned, Bros' effort is no match for the speed of Harlequin, although that game's more involved object handling and intelligent aliens make it a better bet for gamers in search of a deeper challenge.

(Far Left) Boing! Harlequin shows that he can bounce with the best of them in TV Wonderland. The Space Hopper allows Harlequin to drop any height without fear of damage.

(Left) Glug! Don't let Harlequin get wet unless he has fishy power - it spells certain death.

(Below) Boom! Harlequin uses his athletic skills to avoid shrapnel in the Bomb Run.

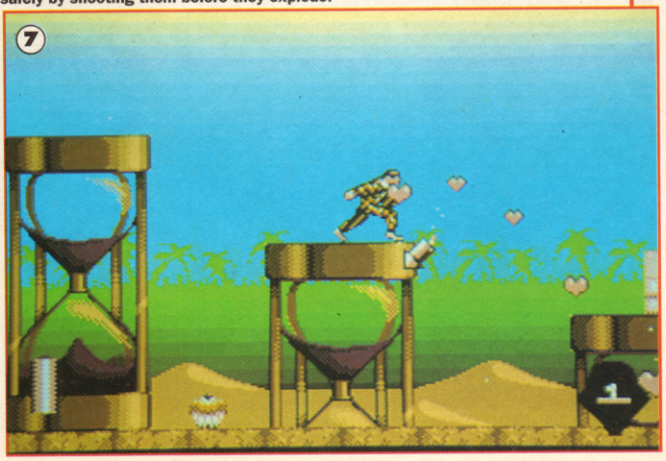




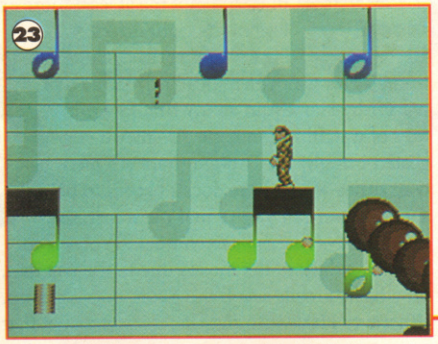
THE JIGSAW PUZZLE Everything slots into place here, with Harlequin bouncing about on the giant jigsaw pieces and doing battle with a surreal array of enemies, such as big pyramids with eyes, strange eyeballs and... oh, just lots of eyes.

THE LEARNING CURVE Jumping into the children's programme from TVee Wonderland leads Harlequin here, to a surreal world of teddy bears, clown faces, alphabet building blocks - and no end of hazards. The enemies may look tame, but they pack just as much of a punk as anywhere else - look out for Mr Punch, who more than lives up to his name.

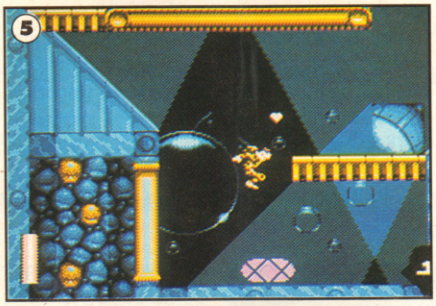
THE BOMB RUN Explosive action all the way as giant bombs drop from the sky, tick away for a few seconds and then explode, sending white-hot shrapnel out in all directions. Naturally this makes things very tricky for poor old 'Quin, but thankfully he can defuse the bombs safely by shooting them before they explode.



THE ORGAN CHAMBER Music is the theme here, with manic maestros, flying guitars, blaring hi-fi's and all manner of other musical mayhem.

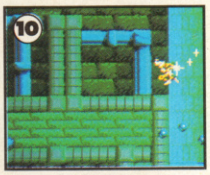


SHEET MUZAK Another musical motif, this time set on a page of sheet music. Harlequin jumps from note to note (the bars themselves are only background), hampered by a huge swirling Space Harrier catterpillar-type thing. Its body sections must be blasted out one at a time.



THROAT OF THE MACHINE All mechanical bits and bobs here - there are so many conveyor belts you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd stumbled onto the set of the Generation Game.

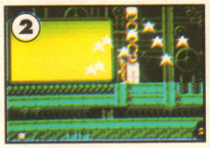
TIP Running against the direction of a conveyor belt not only slows Harlequin down, but also seriuosly depletes his jumping distance. Running with the belt, however, has the opposite effect, speeding him up and allowing for super-jumps.



(Above) **SEWERCIDE** Down in the sewer system, most of the problems are of an aquatic nature. Dripping pipes sap energy, and should Harlequin fall into the sludgy water, it's immediate death.

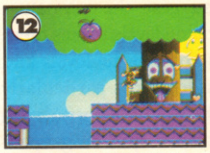
(Left)**THE DREAM MILE** Harlequin becomes a son of the desert for this level, leaping across sand-dunes and giant hourglasses. A sandstorm blows constantly against the player, making movement very tricky.

However Harlequin chooses to work his way around Chimerica, he's got no option but to search every last inch of the place if he's to stand any chance of recovering the four pieces of broken heart. So, here's a helping hand in the form of a comprehensive guide to each of the game's 23 epic levels...



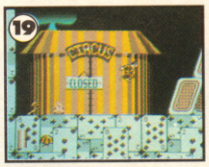
CLOCKWORKS Once inside Chimerica's workings things get altogether more devious, with landscape features like diagonal platforms, bouncy floors and swinging pendulums all coming into play.

A WALK ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS In a level that looks bizarrely like the opening credits to Coronation Street, Harlequin takes on the perils of suburbia in this street of terraced des reses.



CUTESY WORLD is a tongue-in-cheek sideswipe at the sickeningly nice nature of Japanese platform games. Notice that every single, even the sun and the trees object has a face (an old Mario trademark).

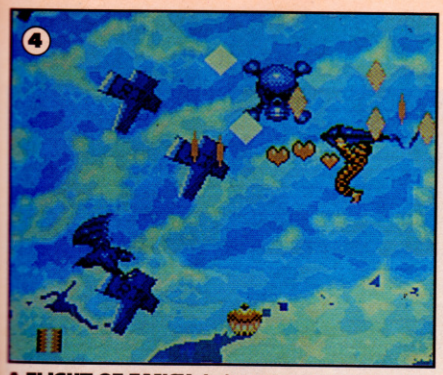
BEATING THE DRUM Loadsadrums! The bigger ones make up the platforms, and their taut skins naturally make excellent bounce surfaces. Smaller ones fall from above and roll towards our hero.



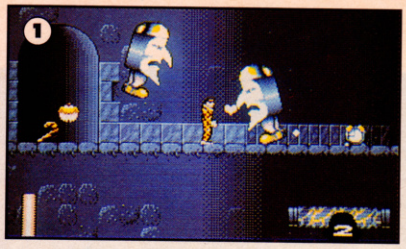
HOUSE OF CARDS Pick a level, any level... If you pick this one you're sure to get a raw deal (guffaw!). Use the card towers to get about the landscape, but watch out for the card sharks! (They are proper sharks, you see, not just sharky people).

MORTICIANS Harlequin has a very tricky mission to undertake (hee hee) here, in this morbid funeral parlour, where the platforms are made of coffins and the most interesting feature is a giant undertaker geezer with massive swingy arms that Harlequin can leap onto.

FATHOM IT OUT Just like Chris Serle, it's time to go in at the deep end. Water is a major player on this level, and Harlequin is basically stuffed unless he can get hold of some fish power for the vital sub-aqua travelling.

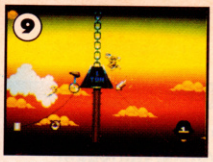


A FLIGHT OF FANCY A pleasant aerial interlude here, with Harlequin sailing right-to-left through the multi-coloured clouds in a simplified dream-like version of an R-Type style shoot'em-up. Just keep firing, basically. A nice touch is that the backgrounds and sprites change each time you play, ranging from biplanes and bombs to this surreal tombstone theme.



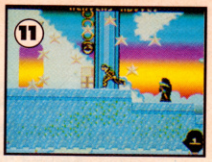
THE CLOCK TOWER The quest begins here, with Chimerica's mighty main gate barred shut. There's a switch somewhere about that will open the door and allow Harlequin inside, but getting to it involves making it to the top of the lofty structure while avoiding the attentions of such monstrosities as rampant alarm clocks and these grotesque leaping masks. Not nice.

Open fire before you even move when the level begins - there's a stack of invisible bonuses for the taking.



THE JUGGLERS The circus is in town! On this level, Harlequin comes up against everything Barnum & Bailey can throw at him. Custard pies, cannons, unicyclists, 10-ton weights, trapeze artists - our monochrome hero has to put up with the lot.

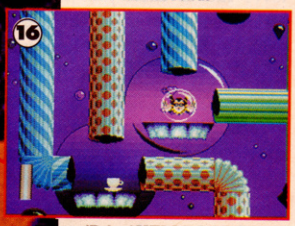
The custard pies and cannons both provide excellent opportunities to gain altitude.



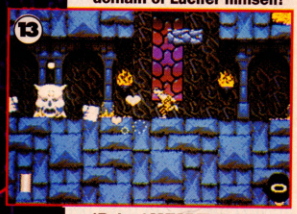
HEAVENS ABOVE Even in the Kingdom of Our Lord, things can cut up rough from time to time. The Grim Reaper is a dab hand with that scythe, so steer clear. Cherubs, pillars and giant harps provide the platforms for Harlequin to jump about on.

(Below) **TVEE WONDERLAND** is really nice. The entire landscape is made up of TVs, the vast majority of which show nothing but static. Throwing switches, however, tunes in the larger screens, and Harlequin can jump "into" any of the three different programmes they broadcast. Wild.

(Below) **SUCK IT AND SEE** Trapped inside a fizzy bubble, Harlequin is sucked through a maze of brightly-coloured soda straws. Weeeird!



(Below) **HELLZAPOPPIN'** After you've been to Heaven, where can you go but down? Yes, it's the domain of Lucifer himself!



(Below) **WHAT A FALL** It's Alice in Wonderland revisited, with all your favourite characters, along with deadly vats of "Drink Me" liquid and other Carroll-esque hazards.

Amiga Version

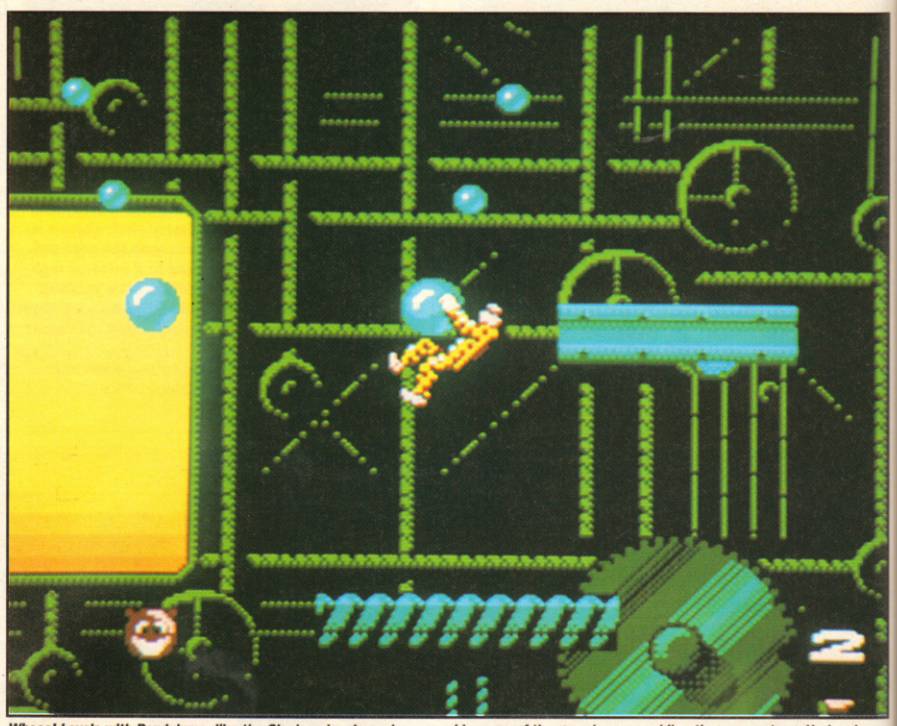
One of the most colourful games in yonks, Harlequin can't fail to strike graphically, and the speed at which the whole thing jogs along is very impressive. Soundwise it's a treat too, with a bagfull of comical effects throughout the game and a delightful title theme. There are a host of nice touches, most centred around the Harlequin himself (watch out for him panting for breath if you push him too hard), and on the whole, it's top stuff.

ST Version

I know what you're thinking. Will it be as good on my Atari? Well, more or less, yes. Like Robocod, Atari owners will have to make do with less colourful backdrops, but aside from that and a slightly smaller screen display, the graphics will be identical and the sound promises to be almost spot-on too. Hooooooooraaaaay!

PC Version

Sorry PC guys, but Gremlin have no plans to release Harlequin for your machine. But if the game's a stonker in the charts, you never know...



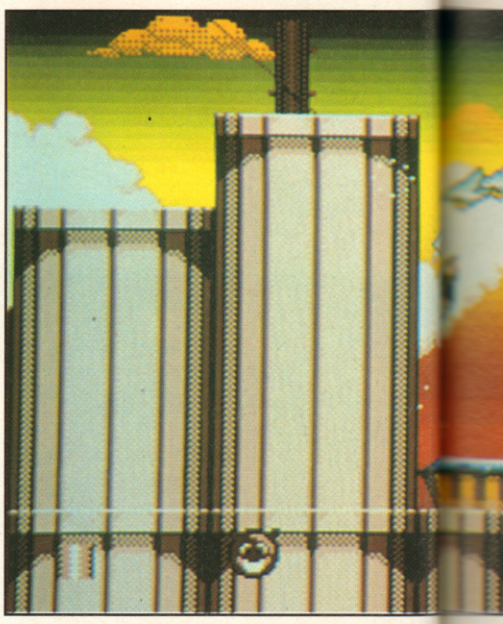
Wheee! Levels with Pendulums, like the Clockworks shown here, provide some of the game's more exhilarating moments as Harlequin swings across the screen with all the grace of a trapeze artist.. It's as difficult as it looks, and with a multitude of hazards threatening to loosen the player's grip at any time, falling off is an all-too-likely prospect. And, of course, the drop can be a very long one. Best, then, to be armed with an umbrella or space hopper before attempting such a dangerous stunt.

61▶ motion or otherwise alter the landscape somehow. The situation of these switches often forces the player to work his way all the way around the level rather than just heading straight for the exit. I'm a little unsure, though, as to how well these switches work. Often the application of a switch is obvious – you hit it and a platform starts moving, for example. In other situations, however, there's no indication of what happens when a switch is thrown because whatever the switch has affected may be in a completely different part of the level. Obviously there wouldn't be much of a point having locked doors if the switch that unlocks them is right next to them, but it can get a tad annoying when you hit a switch and then have absolutely no idea what it is you've done. Some kind of visual or audio clue would have been helpful, without giving the game away entirely. Oh well, you can't have everything - although it'd be nice.

Harlequin's panoramic, open-plan nature may be somewhat off-putting for gamers who are used to playing in a more claustrophobic, controlled environment, but ultimately what it adds up to is all the more challenge - if you're up to it.

In addition to switches, the Harlequin world is densely littered with all manner of goodies, the vast majority of which come hidden in jack-in-the-boxes waiting for the player to open. The yummies available range from energy-giving sweets and cakes to more useful items like an umbrella, which slows Harlequin's descent when falling and allows him to drift downwards like a parachutist (useful when high up, as long drops sap energy), a space hopper for super bounce power, little firework rockets that fly in circles around the player and act as a shield and, perhaps most esoteric of all, a magic thingy that turns Harlequin into a diamond-patterned Angelfish when he lands in water. Without one, the player drowns immediately and that's the end of that, but with the fishy power, there are whole underwater caves, much like Mario's, waiting to be explored.

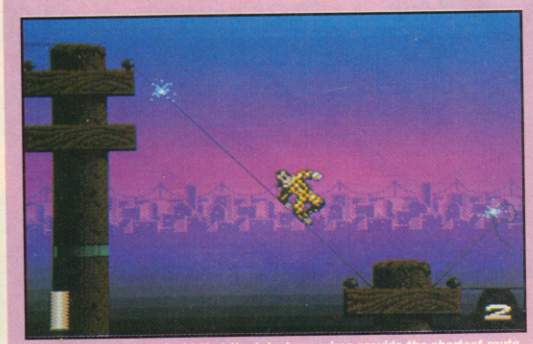
Undoubtedly one of Harlequin's most pleasing features is the central character's remarkable flexibility and acrobatic ability. He runs and jumps like an everyday game geezer, but he also has the ability to crawl through narrow tunnels, slide down diagonal platforms a la Strider and swing, Tarzan-style from the large Pendulum-like devices that are commonplace inside Chimerica's giant workings. The effect, especially to the casual observer, is very much in the same high-spirited skin-of-the-teeth adventure vein as games like Strider and the aforementioned Prince of Persia. Joystick control is super-sensitive and thoughtful, with the player able to change Harlequin's direction completely in mid-jump and fire at any time, regardless of his position. Actually, it's arguable that Harlequin is a little too controllable, as it's easy to oversteer, even though there's no inertia to speak of - something just ever-so-slightly more sluggish would probably have resulted in the player making fewer aggravating mistakes.



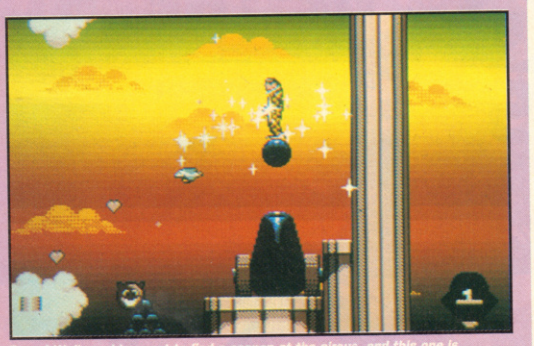
Enemies come in all shapes and sizes - the specific type varies on the level, but there are some generic types that crop up throughout the game in different graphic guises. Harlequin's only defence against these big bad boys is a stream of hearts, which travel in a short downwards arc like the fireballs in Ghouls'n'Ghosts. Initially they're pretty weak, but a power-up which turns them from pink to deep red increases both their range and hit power. Conceptually it sounds a

HOP, SKIP AND JUMP!

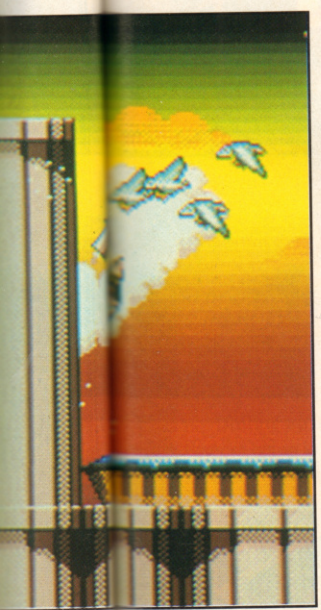
Phew! This Harlequin chappy sure is an athletic fellow. Momentum plays an important part in his movement, so taking a long run-up allows him to leap a lot further than he would be able to from a standing start. Like Strider, he can slide down diagonal surfaces (even super-thin ones like telegraph lines and tightropes) and hang from ceilings, although climbing is a bit much to ask. As the player progresses, he'll find that many aspects of the landscape are just ripe for Harlequin to make athletic use of in one way or another - two of which are shown below. But beware - where something useful is going on, it's a good bet that something equally nasty is taking place nearby, threatening progress.



Aaaillleeee! There's no doubt that the telephone wires provide the shortest route across the rooftops. The only problem is the sparks of electricity that also travel along them. Well-timed jumps are required tro avoid them as they trundle along.



Boom! Well, you'd expect to find a cannon at the circus, and this one is especially useful as the ball it fires transports Harlequin upwards at high speed. Watch out, though, for the flocks of pigeons he encounters at high altitudes.



Kasproing! Though most of the objects in Harlequin can fairly be considered hazardous, there are some that are actually of some help. These special trampolines for example (which appear as giant custard pies on this circus level) send Harlequin zooming into the air when he jumps onto their elasticated surfaces. This is often the only way to reach otherwise inaccessibly-high platforms. So use them.

bit dodgy (I for one have certain reservations about a game where my primary weapon is not a light sabre or a machine gun but a pink heart), but if you block that out of your mind the weapon-firing side of things can be quite frenetic and pleasing. It's a combination of the fact that the player can shoot at all times, regardless of what else he may be doing, and the rapid rate of fire.

As a pyrotechnical display, Harlequin is at its best in situations when there's a lot going on. Generally, when things happen, they do so in an elaborate fashion. Baddies explode into lots of little bits, and the jack-in-the-boxes open amidst a shower of stars and spangly things. It gives the impression of there being lots of action and things being very busy, even when in real terms there may not be much happening. It also makes Harlequin feel very much like a console game - there are times when it looks quite Megadrive-y, in fact - and that atmosphere is backed up by an impressive array of sound effects, which range from the mundane (like the explosions) to the just plain silly, like the excited "wheeee!" that Harlequin utters whenever he slides down a diagonal platform. Though there's no in-game music and some of the effects have a primitive 64-ish sound to them (which I actually quite like), Harlequin is as much an assault on the ears as it is on the optic nerves.

Despite the fact that at first glance it may look like a straight RoboCod rip-off, Harlequin is actually a surprisingly fresh and original game - not really when viewed in a broad, general sense, as the major aspects like objectives and character control are nothing new, but when looked at as the sum of its individual parts.

It's the multitude of smaller ideas and innovative touches, like the space-hopper and fish bits and jumping "into" the television screens to take part in the programmes they're broadcasting that make the difference and lift Harlequin out of the ordinary.

Unlike something like Gods, Harlequin doesn't hit the player too hard with mobile enemies - with the exception of a few levels, alien attacks are sporadic, and they tend to come on singularly rather than in big waves of six or eight at a time. As such, the game's difficulty can be attributed much more to the size and design of the levels themselves. The panoramic, open-plan nature may be somewhat off-putting for gamers who are used to playing in a more claustrophobic, controlled environment, but ultimately what it adds up to is all the more challenge - if you're up to it.

So then, is it any good or what? After all the pontificating, the simple answer is a definite yes. Harlequin impresses both technically and in gameplay terms, and stimulates the intellect and adrenal glands in equal amounts. It's far from perfect, and I doubt there'll be anyone who doesn't find something that gets on their tits in one way or another, but the game doesn't make any major mistakes, and for the most part everything it tries to do, it does spot on target. Programmers The Warp Factory get an extra shiny star in their margins for making such a good job out of such unlikely subject matter, and anyone who appreciates the surreal or bizarre are in for a special treat here. An acquired taste to be sure - but one you'd do well to acquire.

● **Gary Whitta**

ACE TrailBlazer

RATINGS

Superlative high-speed scrolling action.

Athletic character control, always something happening.

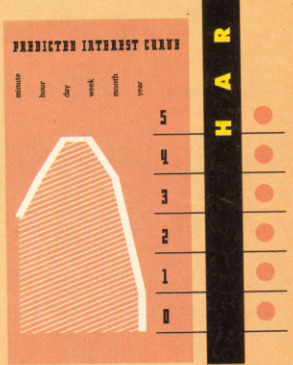
Really quite difficult, actually.

More varied weaponry wouldn't have gone amiss.

900 STRATING

G	IQ	A	FF
8	3	8	9

Despite Harlequin's arcadey depth, it's deceptively easy to get into - the first few screens present not too much of a challenge, allowing the player to build confidence - which is then utterly destroyed by the ferociousness of what happens next. It's true, Harlequin is a very difficult game, and not one for novice platformers. All you seasoned veterans, however, will undoubtedly lap up the challenge it has to offer. The difficulty curve is well-graded. The game's graphic niceness provides extra incentive, as there's a strong compulsion to find out what the next level looks like. Less patient players may well lose sight of Harlequin's charms as soon as the going starts to get tough, but there is no doubt that the rewards are there for players willing to persevere. 23 levels may not sound like a lot, but each one is large and action-packed enough to guarantee muchos fun on a constant basis for at least the next few months.



HARLEQUIN RATINGS

RECKON YOU'RE HARD? RECKON YOU'RE TOUGH?

RECKON YOU KNOW ABOUT GAMES?

RECKON YOU MUST BE READING COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES, THE WICKEDEST GAMES MAG IN THE WORLD!

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WE ARE.

I like a bit of ruck, me. But not in real life of course. Ooh no, your gran can take her handbag stuffed with fivers for a walk along the streets at night secure in the knowledge that I haven't the slightest intention of releasing all of those little anxieties and insecurities that I bottle up inside at her expense. I'd rather punch pixels on the telly. It's safer than the safest safe sex and no-one actually gets hurt.

One of my favourite rucking romps is *Golden Axe*, so you can imagine how chuffed I was to get another chance to slap some sprites in this follow-up.

In Golden Axe II, the land you fought so hard to cleanse of evil once again reeks of the stuff. Dark Guld, the Lord Of Darkness, has arisen to bring the world into chaos by destroying entire countries with his bad-smelling clan. Ooh-ah.

And so the three clean-livin', hard-hittin' n' hackin' heroes - Ax-Battler, Gilius-Thunderhead and Tyris-Flare - are back in what amounts to little more than a remix of *Golden Axe*. Yes, I'm afraid it's more of the same but with a change of scenery, harder-looking adversaries, a sparkling new soundtrack and more impressive spot effects.

GOLDEN AXE II

The most appealing aspect of *Golden Axe* - and its reincarnation for that matter - is the way that the scrapping works. There's none of this poncing around wrestling with the joypad and moving it in the right direction to execute the desired manoeuvre malarkey, oh no. Duffing up the Dark Guld's dudes is simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time and frantically pressing a button. All the hip moves, such as kicking an opponent in the teeth, happen automatically. It is limited, but the fighting feels fine so I'm not complaining.

What I will moan about though is how similar Golden Axe II is to the original *Golden Axe* in terms of playability. The opponents encountered by and large don't look the same as those in *Golden Axe*, but there's sod all difference in their behaviour and positioning within the five short scrolling levels. It's a bit of a cheek, I feel, to simply redecorate a piece of software and stick a 'II' on the end.

There is a slight improvement in one department - and that's the magic (the power of which is improved by collecting tokens released by mystical figures who appear during and at the end of the levels). Golden Axe II's options allow play to progress with either Normal or Special magic mode in force. When the magic button is pressed in Normal mode a spell is automatically cast, its power determined by the on-screen magic-o-meter. In Special mode however, the spell's strength increases when the magic button is depressed and is cast at the magic-o-meter strength shown when it's released. This feature would have been welcome in *Golden Axe*, but its appearance in this samey sequel isn't enough to make a significant difference.

So, to conclude: don't bother with Golden Axe II if you own the original *Golden Axe*. If, on the other hand, you don't own *Golden Axe* but you do fancy a riotous time, get Golden Axe II instead.

● Gary Penn

PRICE
£39.99
(Import)

(Top) Some adversaries ride strange mounts, just like they did in Golden Axe. Here, Gilius-Thunderhead's knocked the bad boy off his beast and hopped on to use its fire-breathing ability.

(Above) Tyris-Flare uses the strongest of her six magic powers: a dirty great firey pheonix which saps the enemy characters of most of their strength.

(Right) The Duel option in Golden Axe II's just like the one in Golden Axe... The hero of your choice slugs it out with the Dark Guld's dudes in a simple head-to-head contest. It's basically like playing a condensed version of Golden Axe II.

There are dozens of great fighting manoeuvres to use, and the non-stop beat-'em-down action is easy – and enjoyable – to get to grips with.

The look, feel and sound generate a quality arcade feel.

There are only five short levels to conquer.

It may have looked slightly different but it's all been seen before

781 FAMICOMRATING

G	IQ	A	FF
8	1	8	8

Golden Axe II is a well-rounded slice of arcade-quality rucking action, with far-out fighting moves, large colourful visuals and slick spot effects - just like its predecessor. And that's its biggest flaw: it's just like its predecessor. It's a cracking purchase in its own right but a worthless sequel. *Golden Axe* owners: you have been warned.

GOLDEN AXE II RATINGS

MEGADRIVE

ARCUS ODYSSEY

PRICE
£39.99
(Import)

Non-stop hack-n'-slay action.

Full of interest sustaining surprises and challenges.

Endless stream of bizrre nasties to off.

Diagonal control takes some getting used to.

A tad too easy to finish.

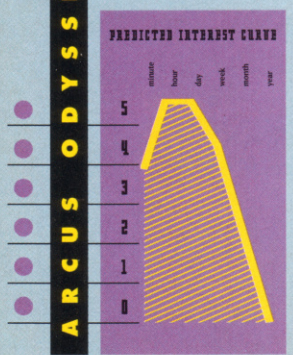
Fiddly password system.

MEGADRIVE RATING 863

G	IQ	A	FF
9	5	7	9

Initially, despite some flash (though occasionally garish) graphics, Arcus Odyssey seems little more than *Gauntlet* at an odd angle with bigger sprites and substantially fewer monsters. First impressions can be, and in this case are, misleading. While the slimoid-smashing forms the major gameplay element, there's also a healthy dose of quest-completing japery in there as well. Although Arcus Odyssey is reasonably challenging, the password system means that the game is likely to be completed sooner rather than later.

ARCUS ODYSSEY RATINGS



Arcus Odyssey is a lot of things, most of them good, but one thing it isn't is original. Take the, if you will, 'plot' - it's yer usual sub-Tolkien, sub-standard game scenario fodder. The Sword of Leaty, the only weapon that can destroy the evil sorceress Castomira, has been stolen by her followers to prevent it ever being wielded against her. As the witch's dark forces cut across the peaceful kingdom of Arcus, a band of warriors set out to reclaim the Sword and put an end to Castomira's reign.

Arcus Odyssey can be played by one or two players simultaneously, each assuming the role of one of the four heroes; a mighty swordsman, a whip-cracking Amazon, an Elven archer or an aged wizard, each with varying fighting, spellcasting and health ratings. As the players explore the scrolling mazes they encounter an more-imaginative-than-usual bestiary of miscreants to slay and heavy oak chests to crack open.

Ho-hum, yet another *Gauntlet* variant. Seen it, done it, bought the T-shirt, eaten the breakfast cereal. Okay, so the influences of Atari's classic four-player coin-op are pretty obvious, but there's much more to Arcus Odyssey than simply beating up beasties and amassing points.

For a start, victory isn't simply a matter of finding the exit from each of the seven huge levels. The players have to complete certain tasks to progress, such as releasing some prisoners from one of Castomira's dungeons or finding a magic key sword. To be honest, none of the tasks requires any true adventuring skill - it's simply a matter of finding the required object and taking it to where it's needed - but having an aim makes the game far more satisfying to play.

Friendlier characters can be chatted to. Well, I say 'chatted', but it's definitely a one-sided conversation - the player simply bumps into the character, a text window pops up and a stream of dialogue appears. This can be useful or useless, either telling you where a certain vital item is hidden or nothing. It's annoying that once you know where a secret item is located, in future games you can't shortcut straight there. Instead you have to talk to the character again, even though you know exactly what they're going to say.

The magic items found in the chests add a bit of spice too. Instead of just awarding increased shot power or speed, they peform sych actions as summoning protective elemental spirits or awarding temporary invulnerability. The player can store the magic items in an inventory and call them forth when required, rather than having to use them as soon as they're collected.

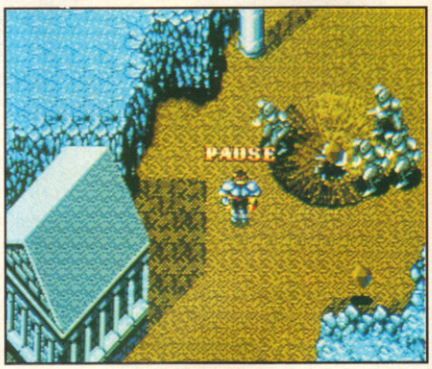
The best thing about Arcus Odyssey is that it keeps getting better and better the deeper you get into it, evolving from a basic smash n' grab treasure hunt into a fine piece of arcade adventuring, with the accent on the arcade. Some of the later level end-of-level monsters are amazing.

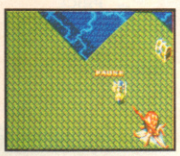
To put it simply, Arcus Odyssey is one of the finest examples of the arcade adventure genre to appear on the Megadrive. Well worth forking out forty sovs for, I'd say.

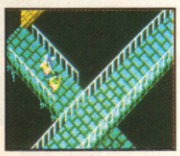
● David Upchurch

(Above) By the spore-spewing purple pods of Nodus! A brave warrior must defeat all those deadly dnadelions in order to collect the jail key from the chest.

(Right) Attack of the skeleton soldiers! And beware the Pit Beast!







(Above top) Octopoid 'orror in Castomira's dungeons.

(Above middle) Well, here are the Tunnels... Where are the Trolls?

(Above) Take care not to get caught by the crabs!

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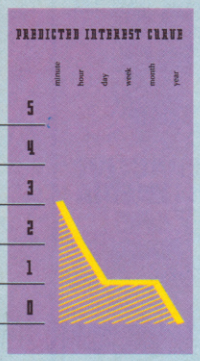
DOUBLE DRAGON II

DOUBLE DRAGON II RATINGS



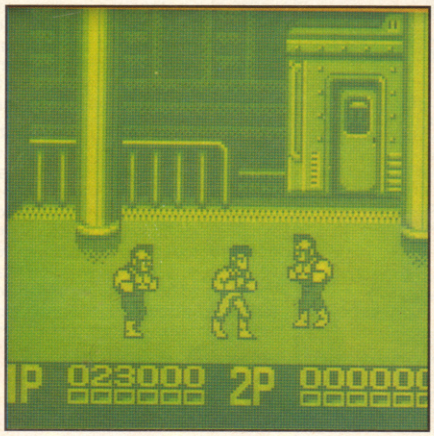
Initially, it all looks very nice but as soon as you get into the 'action', the interest soon drops off. The whole thing's just far too difficult and unfair for it to be any real fun. Barely average graphics and music don't do much to enhance the experience.

PRICE
£24.99
(Import)

G	IQ	A	FF
6	1	5	5

GAMEBOY RATING 560

Haiii-yaaa! It's time once again for those battling brothers Billy and Jimmy Lee to take to the mean streets and dole out their own brand of justice to those who deserve it. The scenario is comically bleak and familiar to anyone who has played previous *Double Dragon* adventures - after a nuclear war destroys the city and his girlfriend is gunned down by punks, Billy Lee joins a new fighting dojo, along with his brother. But just when things are looking up for the twins, Billy is framed for a murder he didn't commit and his own master and colleagues go looking for him for revenge. With the optional help of his brother Jimmy (via a link-up lead), Billy sets out to clear his name by knocking the stuffing out of everyone who crosses his path.



It's basically just *Double Dragon* all over a gain, and there's little in the way of new features or enhancements over the original. As Billy and Jimmy, the players have a couple of kicks and punches at their disposal, the correct combinations of which deal with all the bad guys - the only problem is that the fighting is so simplistic and slow-paced that it quickly becomes repetitive, boring and rather frustrating. The size of the characters means that there's hardly any feeling of real action - when two or three characters get close together, things just become a monochrome mess.

There's no doubt that there's plenty to do in Double Dragon II. It's just that none of it is particularly interesting. It's sold as part of "The Greatest Martial Arts Series Ever", and no doubt loyal *Dragon* fans will fall over themselves to get at it. The more casual GameBoyer, however, has got better things to do.

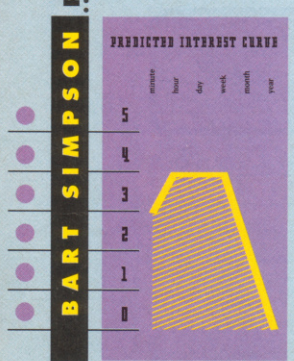
● Gary Whitta

Nice intro sequence.
At least there's always something happening.

No real skill involved in the fighting.
Quickly becomes infuriating.

BART SIMPSON'S
Escape from Camp Deadly

BART SIMPSON RATINGS



Surprisingly, the game's characters really do look a lot like their TV counterparts, and an authentic rendition of the theme tune helps things along nicely. There's plenty to hold the interest, and things only rarely get frustrating. There's a solid couple of month's worth of fun here, and that makes it well worth anyone's hard-earned.

PRICE
£24.99
(Import)

G	IQ	A	FF
7	2	7	8

GAMEBOY RATING 860

Aye Caramba! After a successful outing on the NES and 16-bit machines, the world's most famous tearaway pays a visit to the GameBoy. This time, however, he's not saving the world from space mutants, but saving his own ass from certain death at the terrible Camp Deadly. Stranded at the remote Hellhole for the Summer with his sister Lisa, Bartholomew J must do his best to survive the camp's strict regime of 'fun' past-times, riot-like mess halls and plethora of brawny bullies, all overseen by the maniacal camp counsellor, Ironfist Burns.

To escape from the Camp, Bart must make his way through a number of increasingly difficult scenarios within the compound before scaling the awesome Mount Deadly, which leads to freedom. Each scenario is presented as a formulaic scrolling platform romp - in the first level Bart must scale trees, jump lakes and avoid hornets and bullies to collect flags from around the camp, while later on his job is to survive a murderous food-fight in the canteen and finally take on the dizzying heights of Mount Deadly and its spooky cave network.

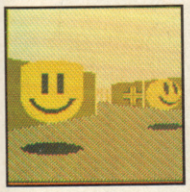
Camp Deadly is certainly a better Simpsons game than *Space Mutants* was - both as a playable game and an interpretation of the cartoon. Simspons fans will recognise all the favourite characters who make guest appearance, along with plenty of the show's in-jokes and humorous touches. Game-wise it's ideal GameBoy stuff - simple to get into, not too demanding, yet challenging in all the right places. Recommended.

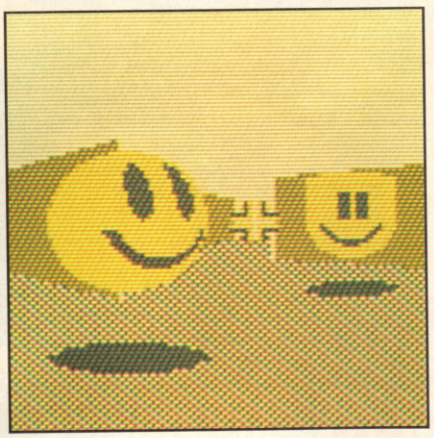
● Gary Whitta

Excellent Simpsons atmosphere.
Very playable platform action.

A tad on the tricky side.

FACEBALL 2000





PRICE
£24.99
(Import)

Fast 3-D - unique on the Gameboy!

Smashing the smiles off the the cutesy enemies is fun.

Inspired multi-player action.

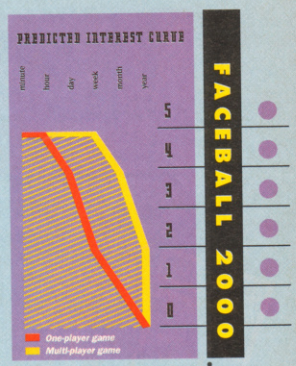
Lonely players may find the action dull and repetitive

Now correct me if I'm wrong, but back in 1987 I seem to remember reading about a very similar game to Faceball 2000 called *MIDI Maze* on the Atari ST. In that aging title the player had to scoot around a series of 3D mazes, zapping *Pac Man*-alike ghosts while avoiding their return fire. Not exactly Earth-shattering stuff, but the big deal was that up to fifteen other ST owners could link up via the MIDI port (hence the name - geddit?) and battle each other. Not that anyone ever did. Would you consider carrying your ST round to your mate's house on a regular basis? Not the most appealing thought in the world, is it?

Faceball 2000 is much the same, but thanks to the portable nature of the 'Boy, it's a more realistic concept. It's the first game in 3D that I've ever seen on the Gameboy, and it's pretty good though basic stuff (mazes are the Janet & John primers of the 3D-programming world). Speedwise it's okay, if not particularly smooth, boding ill for the future appearance of a complex flight sim.

The players (up to four, with suitable connectors) control Smiloids, inanely-grinning spheres, as they zap computer-controlled Smiloids and - heh, heh - each other in a range of torturous labyrinths. There are two playing styles, Cyberscape (where players simply try to escape onto the next maze level) and Arena (a sort of futuristic tag, where players compete to be the first to get ten 'tags' by shooting the others).

As the players progress, the mazes get more complex and the going gets tougher, with harder Smiloids, switchable doors, teleports and what have you making an appearance. Fortunately the player can collect power-ups by shooting pods which makes life easier - but only a little, mind.



FACEBALL 2000 RATINGS

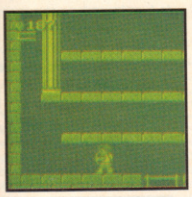
As a one-player game Faceball 2000 is fun for a while, but just running around mazes blasting Smiloids becomes distinctly boring, very quickly. However, add a second player and it brightens up considerably. Add a third and it really starts to take off. Add a fourth and... well, you've never seen a game like it. The unlimited appeal of blasting your inanely grinning mates to Smiloid heaven is irresistible. Faceball 2000 is a reasonable purchase for the single player, but if you can persuade your Gameboy-owning mates to join you then it's essential.

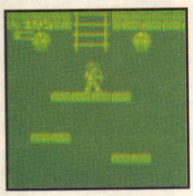
G	IQ	A	FF
9	2	9	8

720/874*

*Multi-player game

KID ICARUS
Of Myths And Monsters





PRICE
£24.99
(Import)

Big, big challenge

Enjoyable zap n' jump gameplay

Ultimately repetitive.

Very tough on later levels.

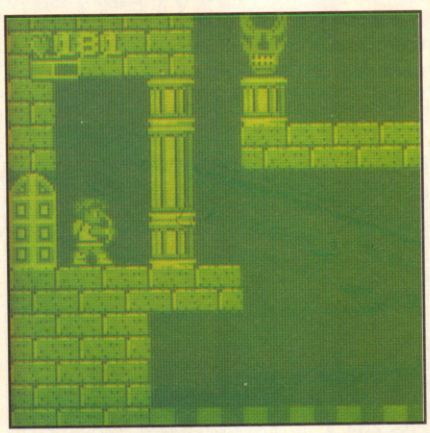
You know, you could get a computer to write the scenarios for these platformy/shooty games. Kid Icarus's is somewhat more flowery than most, but suffice to say it's yer usual lone warrior battling the rampant evil hordes that have laid waste to his world.

But while Kid Icarus is distinctly lacking in the plot department, there are some novel gameplay touches that make this just a little more than a bog-standard entry in the Gameboy software library. For a start each of the sixteen levels is huge and just exploring all the nooks and crannies provides lots of fun and more than a few surprises. This feeling of scale is accentuated by the fact the the scroll wraps round, so that if you keep going left you find yourself back where you started.

Bopping the bad guys reveals a heart - the tougher the enemy the bigger the heart. These can be collected and used to buy equipment - such as hammers to smash your way into secret levels, maps of the level, and so on - in the shop rooms that turn up from time to time. Other rooms are waiting to be discovered where you may find bonus hearts, get help from friends, rejuvenate your health bar or, if you're unlucky, get attacked by vampire bats.

Every fourth level you have to defeat a super baddy guarding one of three magical weapons to help you in your quest. And you'll need all of them before you can defeat the Orcos leader at the end of the game.

● David Upchurch

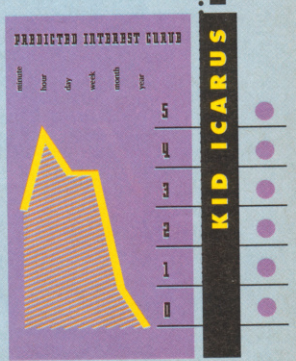


Special thanks to Shekhana Consoles (081 889 9412) for the loan of these review cartridges.

788 GAMEBOYRATING

G	IQ	A	FF
6	3	6	8

Doesn't look too hot, but things soon perk up once you get into it. If anything, Kid Icarus reminds me of a poor man's *Turrican*, with an equally massive and addictive challenge. But for all the game's size, it's not that hard - it should only take a couple of hours or so of solid play to win the first treasure. While this difficulty setting prevents frustration setting in, it does hint that it isn't going to take that long to finish the game, especially with the battery-backed SAVE positions.



KID ICARUS RATINGS

LEMMINGS

SUPER FAMICOM

PRICE
£49·99
(Import)

Supremely playable.
Top-notch joypad control.

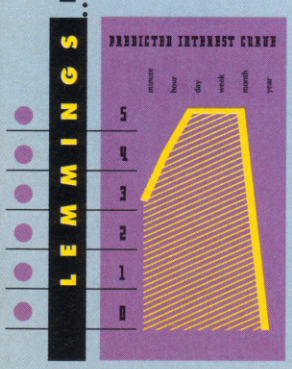
None!

FAMICOM RATING 910

G	IQ	A	FF
8	7	7	9

RATINGS

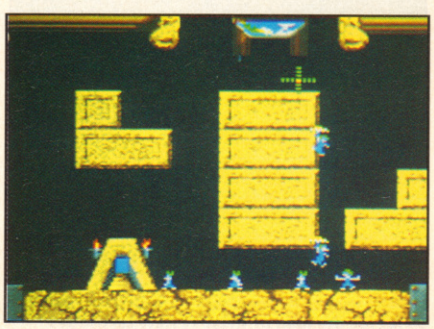
Though it doesn't sound like the easiest game in the world to get into, Lemmings' difficulty curve is graded to allow even the most hopeless players a chance to get started. The first dozen or so screens are well easy, and from then on the extra difficulty elements are added gradually, allowing the player to learn with the game. Admittedly, it does get VERY hard later on, and many less patient players may just choose to switch off rather than persevere. Graphically it's not exactly stunning, but the music jollies things along nicely, with an assortment of silly tunes. Non heinous.

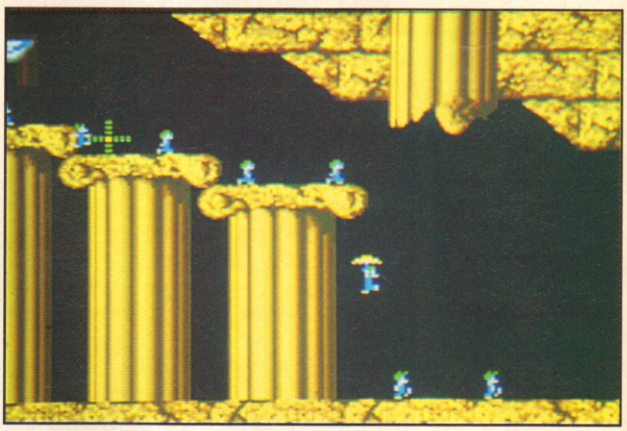


For a company that seems perpetually to specialise in products that offer far more on the aesthetic front than in actual gameplay, it's ironic when you consider that Psygnosis' biggest hit to date by far is one that goes right against their apparent philosophy. Lemmings may have minuscule graphics and silly sound, but it remains one of the most excellently playable, compulsive - and original - games of recent times. Now, on a wave of revived Lemmings hysteria (with the data disk already out and a sequel currently in the pipeline), the silly little sods with the green hair continue their worldwide domination with a new version for the Super Nintendo (née Super Famicom).

There are no surprises on the game front - apart from an all-new intro, it's basically a carbon copy of the Amiga original, right down to the inter-level message screens. The 100 levels are the same as before, as is just about everything else. The idea is to safely escort a band of hapless Lemmings (somewhere between 50 and 100, depending on the level) through each screen's tortuous obstacles and traps to the exit. Mindless creatures that they are, the Lemmings just bumble along blindly, bumping into things, falling off ledges, etc, and generally killing themselves inadvertently. To put a stop to this, and guide the Lemmings to the exit instead, the player can bestow special powers on the Lemmings via an icon bank.

Lemmings can be turned into bridge-builders, diggers, blockers, climbers, parachutists and more - applying the right skills to the right Lemmings at the right time creates a safe route for the rest of the little buffoons to follow. It's not necessary on every screen to rescue every Lemming - in fact often some may have to be sacrificed in order to save others, and as the game progresses only limited resources are available, making strategy and forward-planning all the more important. Essentially it's a question of marrying this tactical stuff with good old-fashioned arcade dexterity (the trick is selecting Lemmings and giving out the tasks quickly before a major disaster occurs - not always easy under pressure). Yes, it gets frustrating at times, but in a way that just makes the player all the more adamant to complete the level, rather than throwing the controller down in disgust. And that's Lemmings' secret - good solid addiction value.





Lemmings can't survive long drops, so ones just about to fall off a high structure (like this column) should be turned into Floaters before they fall. Once over the edge, the open up a little brolly and drift harmlessly to the ground.

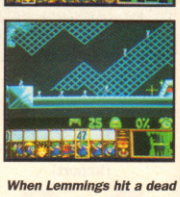
Given Lemmings' technical simplicity and the complexity of its mouse-based control system, the primary problem with converting a game like this onto a console is not duplicating the action faithfully, but making the control work on a joypad, which is fundamentally unsuited to this sort of task. But where the CDTV version failed miserably, the SNES manages without any problems - it may be something to do with the SNES joypad having four extra buttons, but the real key is in the Nintendo converters' better understanding of the game. The top two buttons cycle back and forth through the ten icons (rather than having to click on them with the pointer, although this is possible), while the others select the Lemmings. Although control of the pointer isn't as flexible as with a mouse, it works perfectly well - a particularly nice touch is that those funny little index-finger buttons at the top of the SNES controller that hardly ever do anything have been put to good use here - they scroll the map left and right, leaving the pointer free to get on with other business.

Though initially cynical, I have to admit I was well impressed by SNES Lemmings - the game has been implemented perfectly and a more than commendable job has been made of the control mode. With so much drudgy arcade stuff being churned out for the big Nintendo at the moment, Lemmings comes as a refreshing reminder of what good software is all about - and proves that we can still show the Japanese a thing or two about game design. Super NES owners shouldn't hesitate in buying this one - anyone who does, we'll want to know the reason why.

● Gary Whitta

ACE TrailBlazer

Blockers are the ideal way to turn Lemmings about face. The only problem is, Blockers can't be changed back and must be destroyed when finished with. Thus, any level that requires a 100% rescue rate is NOT a level for Blockers.



When Lemmings hit a dead end, like a solid wall, a Basher can provide the way forward simply by punching a hole through the strcuture. Certain surfaces, like metal, are impervious to bashing, so Lemmings may have to take the long way round.

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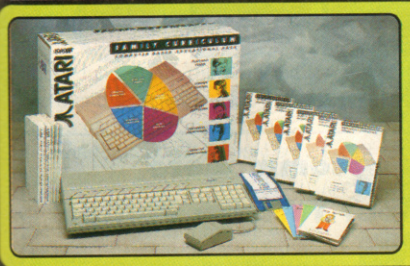

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& PHONE WIN!

A Complete Home Entertainment System!

An Amazing CDTV from Commodore AND A Great Portable Colour TV from Philips

And you thought you'd seen the last of it, but no! Emerging like some fearsome monster from another dimension comes the scourge of the publishing world, the ACE Interactive Phone Line. But you'd be forgiven if you failed to recognise your old 0839 friend, because it's had a complete overhaul.

Yes. For its all-new revamped look, the ACE Interactive Phone Line has shed its slightly stuffy image for a more instantly gratifying feel. And to celebrate the return of the line which will be appearing in one guise or another on a page very near here from now on, we're kicking the service off by giving ACE readers the chance to enter - in the words of Les Dennis - a truly fandabidozee competition.

Indeed. The lucky winner of this particular contest will no longer find themselves being Mr Nobody, but instead Mr Somebody, Happeningsville, as they become the recipient of not only this glamorous and exciting television, but this even more exciting and glamorouser CDTV thing from Commodore.

A Bit About The Telly

This is what is known as a 2331 TV and it's made by Philips. It's 36cm big and it's got a scart lead in the back enabling not only videos and satellite dishes to be plugged into it, but consoles and computers too. It gives wonderful reception and would take pride of place in any bedroom/lounge.

A Bit About The CDTV

This is what is known as a CDTV, which stands for Commodore Dynamic Total Vision. You'll have already read a great deal about it, so we won;t go over old ground. In a nutshell, the deal is this: CDTV has two really good things in it. One is a compact disc player and the other is an Amiga. When these two things are put together you get video, sound and great Amiga games, all combined in a dreamy and stylish black box. Software companies from around the world are developing all manner of great programs to run on the system.

HOW TO ENTER

Easy! Just pick up the phone, dial the number at the bottom of the page and listen to the voice at the other end of the line. The voice will ask you three questions. If you get all three correct, you will be asked to leave your name and address. After the closing date of the competition, a winner will be drawn at random from the entries recorded. Please speak clearly or we won't be able to send you your prize. That's all. Good luck!

RULES & COSTS

The lines will remain open until 8th March. No employees of Emap Images or their relatives are eligible for entry. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. While every care is taken, we cannot accept responsibility for entries lost in the system.

Calls are charged at 34p per minute at cheap rate and 45p per minute at other times. Before you dial the compo-line, please get the permission of the person who has to pay the phone bill.

The Number

0839 500 808

CRUISE FOR A CORPSE

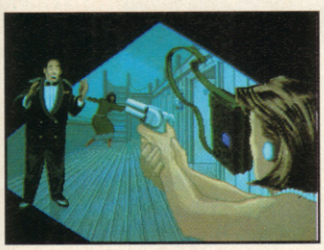
Nasty business, murder. And it's an even nastier one to solve. So thank US GOLD for a mighty complete solution for those whose deductive powers are completely enfeebled!

Take the paper and unfold it. Read it. Go to the bar and show the paper to the barman. Read the prayer book. Take the letter and read it. Go to the smoking room and speak to Tom about Tom. Go to the deck and speak to Suzanne about Suzanne. Go to Daphne's cabin and open the door. Speak to Julio about Julio.

Go to Fabiani's cabin and pull the suitcase on the left. Open it. Go to the dining room and speak to Fabiani about Fabiani. Go to the bar and speak to Suzanne about Julio. Go to the smoking room and take the paper. Go to Tom's cabin and speak about Suzanne and about Fabiani's suitcase. Go to Julio's cabin and speak to Julio about the friendship between Suzanne and Fabiani.

Go to the dining room and speak about Suzanne's invitation. Go to Raoul's cabin and take the small key. Go into Karaboudjan's office and unlock the writing desk. Examine the jewel box and its clasp/fastening. Take the thank-you letter. Go to the dining room and open the drawer. Examine drawer and take the invitation cards.

Go to the deck (on the right) to observe Tom and Rebecca. Go to the laundry room and examine the laundry basket. Examine the necklace and the photo. Go in front of



the mermaid and speak to Dick about Dick. Go to the smoking room and speak to Tom about Agnes. Go to see Fabiani in his room - knock before entering. Speak to him about the thank-you letter.

Go to Julio's cabin and speak to him about the bell tower. Go to Suzanne's cabin and open the left wardrobe. Search the cosmetic case and take the prescription. Go to the bar and take the glass and the bottle. Go to the upper deck and speak to Suzanne. Give her a drink. Speak to her about the prescription. Go to Hector's room and speak to him about Agnes' illness and her stay with Niklos.

Go to the smoking room and speak to Tom about the death of Agnes and her will. Go to the deck and look through the porthole of Rebecca's cabin. Go to Suzanne's room and open the right-hand cupboard. Search the pile of laundry and take the envelope. Go to Fabiani's room (knock on the door) and open the cupboard and take the watch. Speak to Julio about the watch.

Go to the upper deck and speak to Rose about Rose. Go to Rebecca's room and speak to her about Rebecca. Go to Daphne's room and speak to her about Rose. Now go to the bar and speak to Suzanne about Rose. Go to the dining room and speak to Fabiani about Rose's sadness and about Raphael Lambert. Go to Niklos' office and speak to Hector about everything. Speak to him about Mercedes, mother of Daphne. Speak to Julio about the death of Niklos. Speak to Fabiani about the relationship between Daphne and Rebecca and Rebecca's character. Speak to Hector about Daphne's mother.

Go to the upper deck and search Rose's bag. Talk to Rose about the gun advertisement. Go to Logan's room and open the wardrobe. Search the pile of clothes and take the letter. Go to the upper deck and throw the lifebelt. Go to the laundry room and examine the pot/jar. Go to Suzanne's room and examine the music box. Insert the key, stop the ballerina and turn the key. Take the letter.

Go to the bar and take Daphne's bag. Go to Daphne's room and talk to her about Agnes' will. Go round the deck and talk to Rebecca, Daphne, Rose and Fabiani. Go to the bar or on the deck and speak to Suzanne about the relationship between Tom and Rebecca. Go in front of the mermaid and speak to Dick about the relationship between Tom and Rebecca and about the plot. Go to Raoul's room and take the envelope on the ground.

Go to Hector's room and do not speak to Dick. Go to the kitchen and take the tin opener. Operate the hatch/trapdoor. Take the crowbar and use it on the plank. Take the spool of film. Use the crowbar on one of the cases. Take the tin and use the opener on it. Go to the engine room and take the screwdriver.

Go to the smoking room and get out the projector. Put the reel of film on the projector and use the screwdriver on the screw. Operate the switch. Go out towards the mermaid. Go and see Suzanne. Go to Van Muller's room and find the technical manual. Open it and look at the inscription ('INCAL'). Take the book and go to the study.

Examine the books and put them in order so that they read INCAL. Enter the secret passage and fight or throw the soap that you find in the toilets on the right. Search the Mafioso and take the puppet. Go to the smoking room and show the puppet to Daphne. Point out the guilty party. Congrats! You solved the crime!

TRICKS 'N' TACTICS TNT TRICKS 'N' TACTICS

FIRST SAMURAI

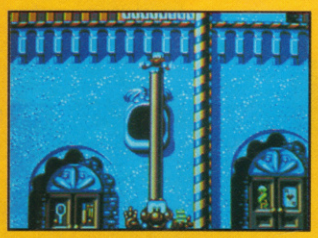
Ah so! This game is compreetry rubbery. In fact, I rub it to death! But it is velly dirricult. To hep the honollable walliors out in game rand, here is a blakedown and maps of rebels hwun to far.

KEY

B	Bell
RB	Recurring bell
X	Potion
L	Lamp
S1	Log
S2	Bucket
S3	Rock
S4	Electric spark
EOL	End of level
P?	Recharge pot
W	Wizard hint pot
T	Transporter
+	Destroyable piece of background

(Special thanks to John Twiddy and all at Vivid Image Design for all their help.)

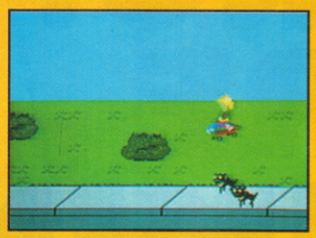
snip TiPS



ROBOCOD

Want to know how to find the two secret levels in this ace platform jape? It's easy, thanks to Martyn Jones from Cwmllynfell in Swansea. Run right (taking care to jump over the first two doors) until you reach the last tower. Climb it, then go left so that you end up on the roof. Keep going left and you should find yourself walking behind the wall of the next tower. Hey presto! You're in!

But, asks Martyn, who is Katie???



BART SIMPSON VERSUS THE SPACE MUTANTS

Don't have a cow, man! Ocean's The Simpsons tie-in is NOT easy, so thank the sweet Lord for Paul Murphy from Mullingar in Ireland for this short n' sweet little cheat to get infinite lives. Simply type in COWABUNGA on the title screen and unlimited Barts are yours. If that isn't a good tip I'll eat my shorts.

RAILROAD TYCOON

Sid Meier's classic has just been converted across to the Amiga and Atari ST, so what better time to tell that you can increase your meagre cash supplies by pressing down SHIFT and 4 at the same time. Thanks to Hiren Patel from Edmonton for that. He also warns that overuse of this sneaky cheat can result in the game crashing - you have been warned.

PLAYER MANAGER

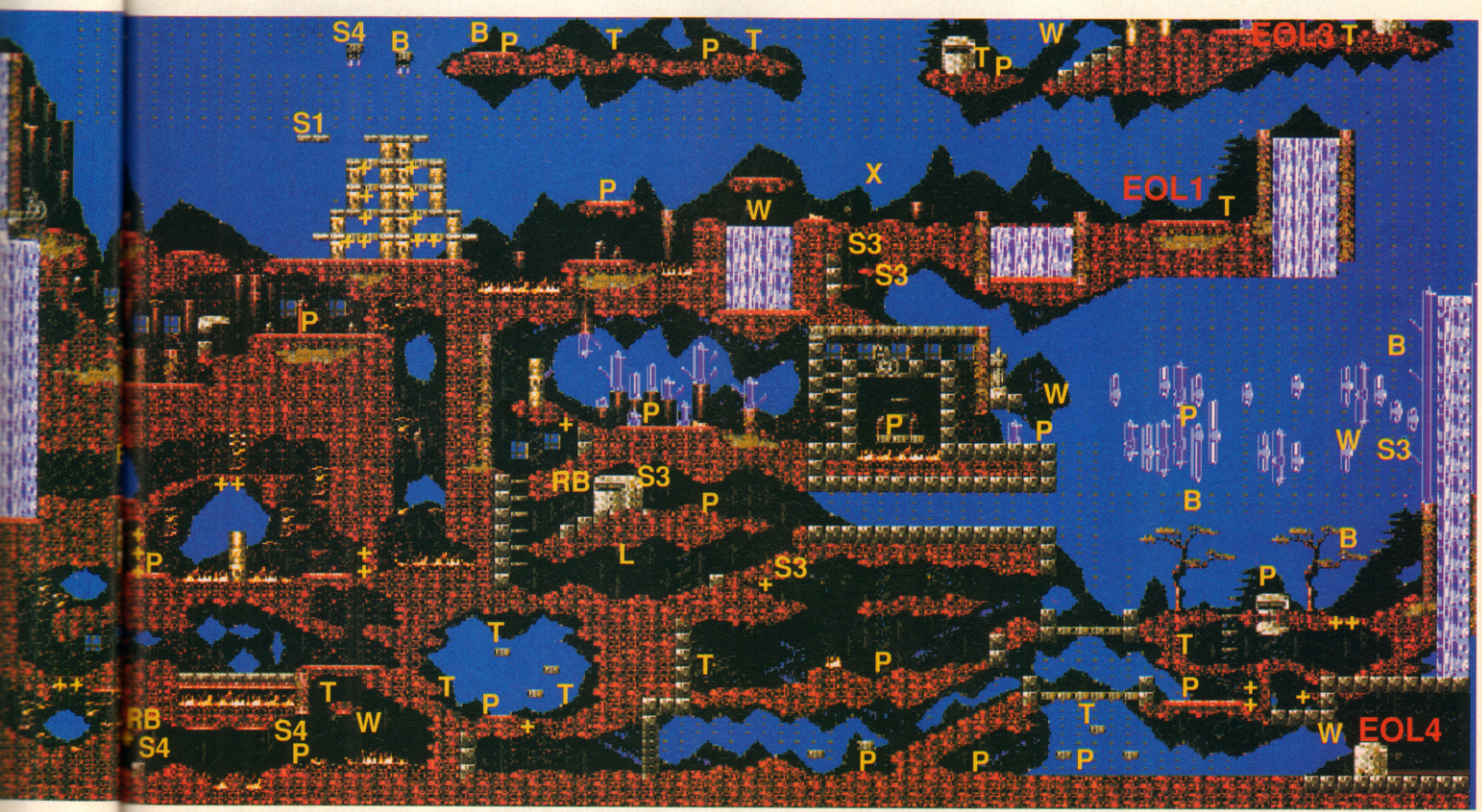
To get oodles of money in Anco's dreamy footy management game, remove 8 or 9 players and after two or three defeats you'll receive lucrative sponsorship. You can then bring the players back in again.

ANOTHER WORLD

This stunning 3D arcade adventure deserves all the success it's getting - it's a brilliant game. Max Harrower from St Austell, Cornwall, has been beavering away at the game and has kindly provided the following pass codes to the game's various stages: EDJI; HICI; FLLD; LIBC; CCAL; EDIL; KCIJ; FLAK; ICAH; LALD; LFEK.

LOTUS TURBO CHALLENGE 2

Try typing DUX as the password to enter a whacky duck shooting game. Oh, those guys! Even handier, try DEESIDE to advance through the stages regardless of whether you win or not, or TURPENTINE to stop the clock. Thanks to David Massey of Tarvin in Cheshire!



TRICKS 'N' TACTICS

TNT

OH NO! MORE LEMMINGS

Oh no indeed. Only a couple of days after the all-new adventures of the green-haired scamps hit the shelves, we received the complete codes to all 100 levels from Robert Phelps of Stroud in Gloucester. Way to go, Phelps dude! Most bodacious quick work! For your troubles you'll be receiving TWO - yes, TWO - brand-spanking new pieces of software for your computer any day now.

TAME LEVELS

2	IHRTDNCCAD
3	MPTDLCADAN
4	PTDLCIMEAG
5	TDLCAHVFAQ
6	DLCIHVTGAJ
7	LCALVTDHAG
8	CIMTTDLIAD
9	CAIPUDLJAQ
10	IHRUDLCKAK
11	LRUDLCALAH
12	RUDLCILMAQ
13	UDLCAHVNAJ
14	DLCIHVUOAS
15	LCAMTUDPAO
16	CIMUWLHQAP
17	CAHRTFLBBL
18	KHRTFLCCBG
19	LPTFLCADBR
20	RTFLCRLEDK

CRAZY LEVELS

2	FLCIHUTGBL
3	NCALWTFHBN
4	CKLTTGNIBF
5	CCHSUFLJBH
6	IHSUFLCKBO
7	LRUGLCCLBN
8	RUGLCKLMBG
9	VFNCAHUNBN
10	FLCKHWUOBI
11	NCAMUUFPBE
12	BIMTUNLQBR
13	CEHPTDOBCP
14	KMPTLICCCI
15	LSBLICADCI
16	RVLKCKMECF
17	DDOCCHWFCI
18	DOCKITTGCP
19	ICAMVVMHCR
20	CIMUVLIICI

WILD LEVELS

2	BAIQUMOJCO
3	IIPWMICKCD
4	MPUEMCCLCM
5	PUDMCKLMCD
6	VEMCCHWNCQ
7	LICOITWOCQ
8	OCCLVUEPCH
9	CKLWUEOQCR
10	CAHRTGMBDP
11	IHSTFMCCDI
12	STGOCILEDR
13	VOKCCHVFDR
14	NKCOHWVGDO
15	ICCLVVOHDF
16	CKMTTOIRDL
17	CCHSUGOJDN
18	IHRUFOCKDS
19	LQUNICALDQ
20	QUGMCIMMDH

WICKED LEVELS

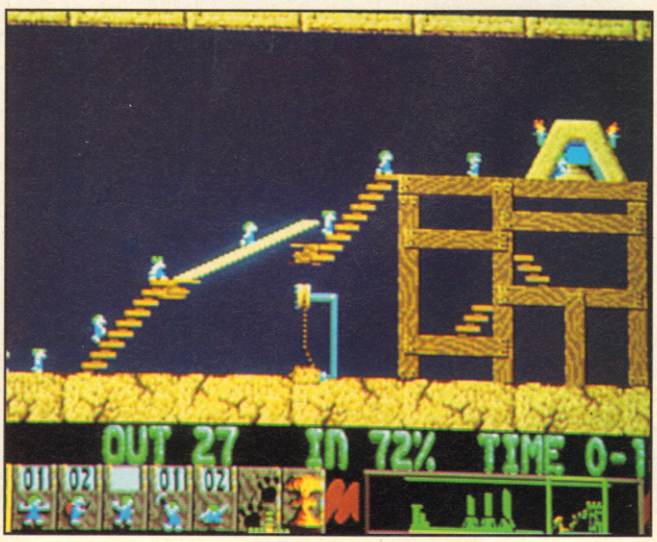
2	NKCOHWWODH
3	MCALWUFPDG
4	CILVUGMQDP
5	GAIRTLHBEF
6	KHRTDNGCEN
7	MPTEHGADES
8	QVLHGOMEEL
9	VLHGAHWFEP
10	DLGKHTTGER
11	NGALTTEHEP
12	GKLVVLJIER
13	GGHPUELJEO
14	OISULHGKEO
15	MPUELGCLER
16	PUMHGKLMEN
17	UMJGGITNEN
18	DMGIHUUDEL
19	HGELWULPEQ
20	GQMVWMJQEM

CALLING ALL TOP TIPSTERS!

We need tips. Lots of tips. Lots and lots and lots of tips. Lots and lots and lots and... well, you get the idea. And we want YOU to send them to us. We'll accept any old rubbish... er... tip, whether it be a baby cheat, a set of pass codes, hand-drawn level maps or a complete adventure solution.

But we're not expecting you to do it for the love of ACE alone. Oh no. If we print your tips, we'll send YOU a piece of top-quality software for your machine. For really outstanding tips we'll send you even more, like the two pieces of software we've awarded to Robert Phelps for his sterling Lemmings work.

So, don't be shy! Send your tips to: ACE Tip Top Tips, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU.



HAVOC LEVELS

2	KHRTGNGCFR
3	LQTFLGADFI
4	STFLGLIEFD
5	TGLGCHWFFP
6	FLGKHWTGFH
7	NGALWTFHFE
8	GKLUTOHIFQ
9	GAHRUGLJFN
10	KHSUGNGKFR
11	MSWGHFCLFE
12	RUFNGKLMFP
13	UFLGAHVNFE
14	FLGMHTUOFP
15	NGALVUGVFN
16	GIMTWNJQFK
17	GCIQVMIBGM
18	MHPTDOGCGQ
19	LQTEMGGDGP
20	STEOGILEGG

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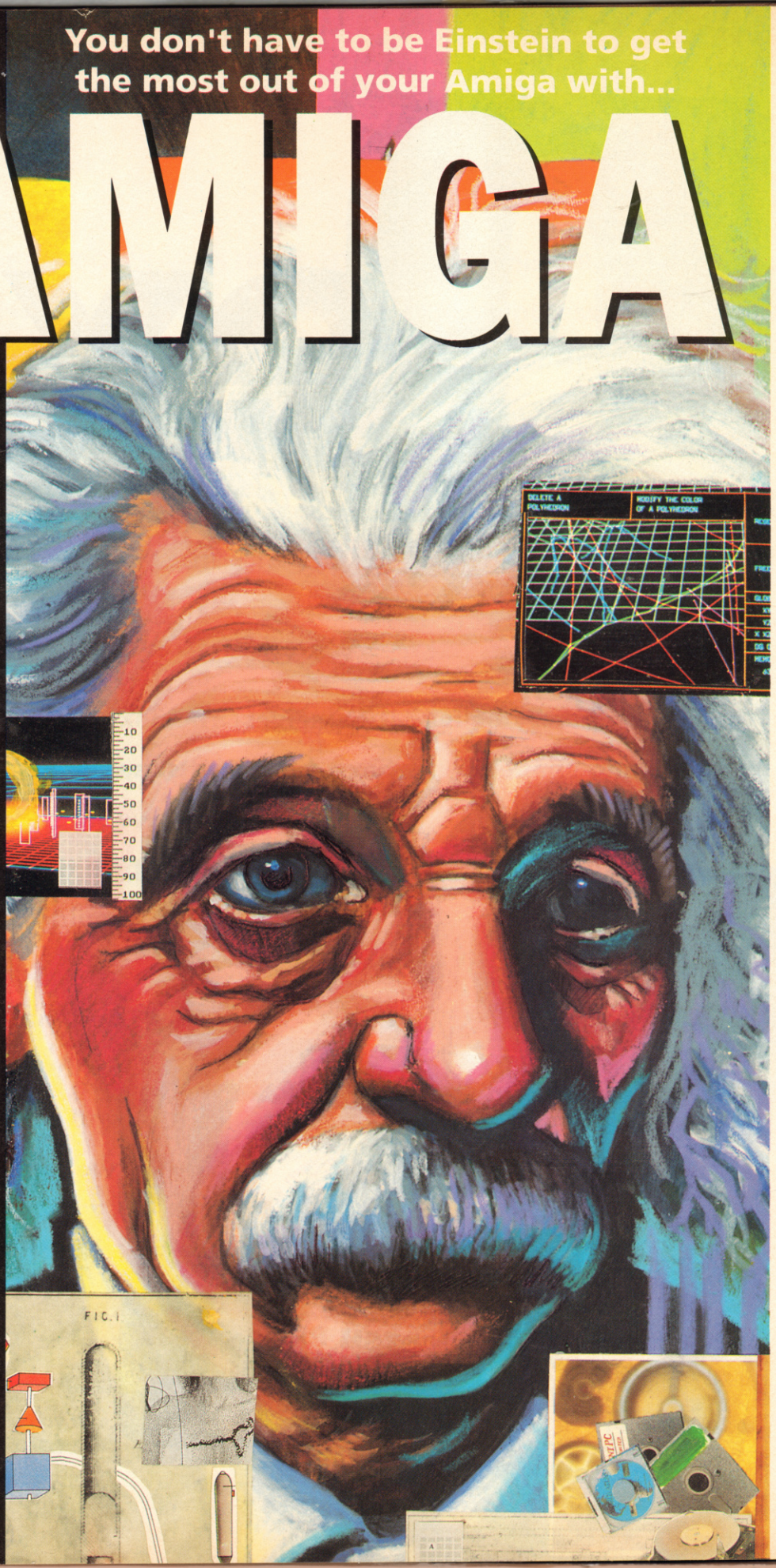
- **100+ games reviewed** every month.



Beyond games with...

CU AMIGA

next!

ACE Disk 2!

Yes, we can hardly believe it ourselves! The next issue of ACE Magazine is already taking shape, and what a beautiful shape it is. More beautiful, some would say, than the most beautiful thing in the world, but we wouldn't.

And that's because we've suddenly come over all modest and restrained. To be honest, we can't be doing with all this

Oh, my word! It's another disk! And it'll be full of the most excellent Public Domain software and playable demos for Amiga, PC and ST owners. If you enjoyed this month's offering, you'll love the next one!

next month

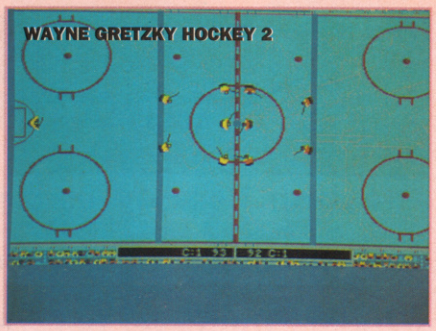
BIGGER BRIGHTER BETTER ONWARDS UPWARDS MORE rubbish. Because, on top of the fact that ACE is already functioning on 100% Excellentness, with its Style Motors fully operational and its Fact Content soaring higher than ever before, frankly, it can't get much better.

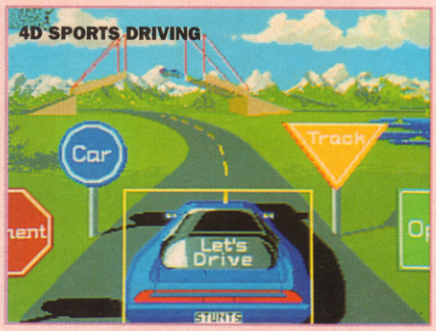
So let's play safe and steer clear of all the grand claims which we're sure you've become thoroughly bored of reading. Instead, we'll say that the next issue will contain:

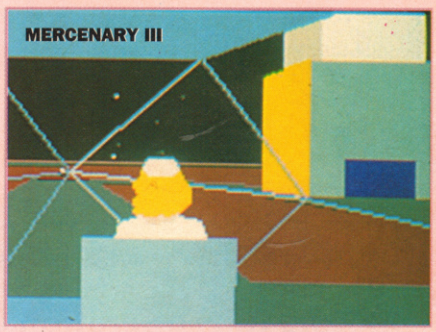
- **A SIMILAR Screentest section, still offering the most detailed games buying information anywhere.**
- **A ROUGHLY EQUAL amount of Previews**
- **A FAMILIAR LOOKING number of News stories**
- **In the Works features PROBABLY JUST AS EARLY as this month's**
- **THE SAME (rather high) quality of material on the disk**

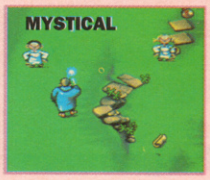
ACE APRIL - £2.75 with Tri Format Disk

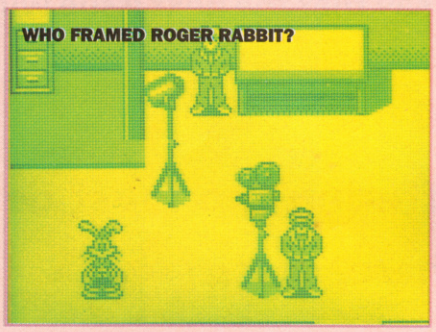
On The Shelves March 8th.

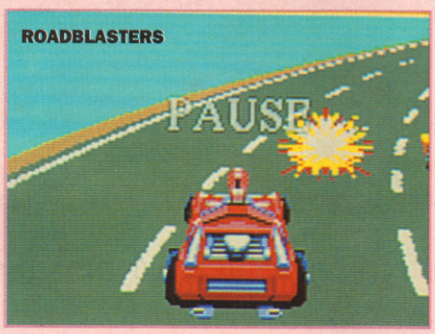


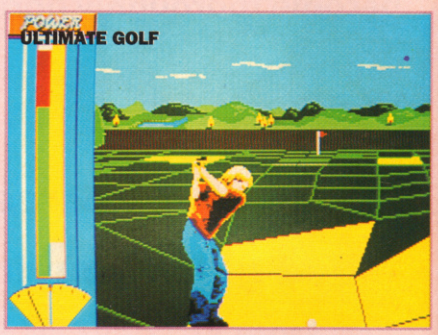












new releases

28 days. 672 hours. 40,320 minutes. 2,419,200 seconds. That's all it takes for yet another bunch of high-quality (and alas, not-quite-so high-quality) software to parachute its way onto the shelves of your local software retail outlet emporium. And that's all it takes for us to come up with yet another blistering New Releases section, where we give you the low-down on every single last one of those new products. Not only that, but we provide pictorial information on a choice selection of said games, to ensure that the reviews are as much a banquet for your eyes as they are for your cerebral cortex. Excellent!

reviews directory

With a hearty cry of "Tra-la-laa!" and a mighty roar of "Hey-nonny-nonny!" for every honest Yeoman we proudly unveil the Reviews Directory. So unfurl the flags of all nations and get the servants to prepare a tasty meat feast (or a little peas/courgette special something if you're vegetarian) to keep you going as you get tuck into the THIRTY - yes, THREE-OH! - pages of hard-hitting, pull-no-punches, take-no-prisoners, other-words-joined-by-hyphens games information.

But let us spare a thought for those new readers out there who may be alighting on this highly-crafted and esceptionally well-written section for the very first time (and there's a first time for everyone, remember - yes, even you with bad haircut). "Why hence all the hoo-haa?" they cry. Simple. In the pages that follow you find all the basic information you'll ever need on every game released over the last THREE months. "Wow!" you cry. Yes, "Wow" indeed. And because you, the dear and loyal reader, demanded it, here are what those star ratings means in, ahem, full.

☆☆☆☆☆	**Excellent**
☆☆☆☆	**Very Good**
☆☆☆	**Above Average**
☆☆	**Poor**
☆	**Dismal**

New Releases:

4D Sports Drivin'
Awesome Golf
Dimension Force
Final Fantasy 2
John Madden Football
Jupiter's Masterdrive
Mercenary III
Mystical
Ninja Gaiden Shadow
Paperboy 2
Road Blasters
Roger Rabbit
RPM Racing
Rubicon
Sonic The Hedgehog
Super Fire Pro-Wrestling
Ultimate Golf
Wayne Gretsky's Ice Hockey 2

Still Available:

A320 Airbus
Action Pack
Another World
Aerostar
Alien Breed
Amnios
Another World
Baby Jo
Barbarian 2
Battle Isle
Birds of Prey
Breach 2
Bugs Bunny 2
Captain Planet
Castlevania IV
Celtic Legends
Centurion (Def. of Rome)
Choplifter 2
Cisco Heat
Civilization
Conan the Cimmerian
Cruise For A Corpse
Deathbringer
Devil Crash
Devious Designs
Double Dragon III
EA Hockey
Elf
Epic
Eye of the Beholder 2
F-15 Strike Eagle 2
F-22 Interceptor
Face Off
Fatal Rewind
Fighter Command
Final Blow
Final Fight
First Samurai
Flicky
Floor 13
Football Director 2
Formula 1 Grand Prix
Fuzzball
Galaga '91
The Games - Winter Challenge
Great Napoleonic Battles
Gunship 2000
Hard Drivin'
Hard Nova
Hare Raising Havoc
Heimdall
Hudson Hawk
Hunter
The Immortal
Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker
Knightmare
Lotus Turbo Challenge 2
Last Ninja 3
Leisure Suit Larry 5
Mad TV
Magic Garden
Martian Memorandum
Megafortress
Mega-lo-Mania
Megatraveller 2
Megatwins
Mercs
MiG29M Super Fulcrum
Might & Magic 3
Monster Business
Moonstone
Nebulus 2
Never-Ending Story 2
Outrun
Outrun Europa
Pacman
Pegasus
Pitfighter
Populous 2
Putt n' Putter
Railroad Tycoon
Realms
Rise of the Dragon
Robin Hood
Robocod
Robocop 3
Robozone
Rodland
Rugby - The World Cup
Sarakon
Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe
Seven Colours
Shuttle
Silent Service II
Sliders
Solitaire Poker
Smash TV
Steve McQueen
Westphaser
Strike Fleet
Superplex
Suspicious Cargo
Turtles - The Coin-Op
Thunderburner
Thunderhawk
Tip Off
Toe Jam & Earl
Traders
Under Pressure
Utopia
Volfied
Vroom
Willy Beamish
Wing Commander II
Wolfchild
World Class Rugby

new releases

4D SPORTS DRIVING

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Racing Simulation**
Publisher **Mindscape**

A very long time indeed after the PC original hit the streets, this Amiga version of the auto-effort from the people who wrote the superb 4D Sports Boxing really hits the spot.

Don't be put off by the crappy box artwork (a 'spacematic' car driven by silver men with laserbeam eyes, of you please). This is an excellent simulation of driving some of the most exciting cars in the world around some of the most ridiculous and hazardous tracks to ever come out of a games designer's head.

With some of the advantages that made Indy 500 such a laugh, such as a video playback mode and spectacular crashes, 4D Sports driving has all the elements that a fun driving game should have, with very little of the tedious drudgery that many have included in the name of realism.

The player can either race solo or against one of a host of computer controlled assailants. These electronic drivers have considerably more personality than the faceless robots driving drone cars found in other race games. Before each race against one of these maniacs, the player gets a breakdown of their particular psychological defects, whether they're speed freaks, bump merchants or whatever.

The action is executed in admirable 3D (the Fourth Dimension is YOU!) and even if the races themselves aren't that fascinating, the track designer section will provide you with enough entertaining pile ups to keep you coming back for more.

☆☆☆☆

AWESOME GOLF

Price **Lynx £29.99**
Genre **Sports Simulation**
Publisher **Atari**

It's a constant surprise to me how well golf games work on computer. You'd think the slow pace and highly physical nature of the sport just wouldn't make for a good computer game at all. But it nearly always seems to work well. Awesome Golf is the first golf game on the Lynx handheld and it's pretty good stuff.

The player can choose to play on either British, US and Japanese courses. As the player moves the cursor between windows choosing which one to play, the game tune changes subtly to reflect the country currently selected. Nice. There's also some cutesy speech during the game which is very entertaining.

Although there are some nice 3D views when the golfer takes a swing, the actual mechanics of the game are handled in 2D. Each shot begins with a plan view of the current green. The player can scroll about it using the cursor pad and even zoom in and out thanks to the marvel of the Lynx's sprite manipulating hardware.

Using a small cursor the player aims the shot, then chooses a club. Annoyingly there's no on-screen information to tell you the maximum range of each club so you have to keep referring to the instruction booklet. Taking a swing is achieved by the familiar hitting the button when a swiftly moving marker is over the shot power you want then hitting the button again to give the ball left or right snap.

While Awesome Golf doesn't exactly set a new standard for computer golf games, it's a classy addition to the genre and is a recommended to all sports-loving Lynx owners.

☆☆☆☆

DIMENSION FORCE

Price **Super Famicom £39.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Asmik**

Cor! What with helicopter mania set to sweep the country over the next few months, we were more than a little excited with the prospect of a full-blown helicopter romp on the Famicom. Indeed, the design guys seem to have got their act together, dishing up exactly the right sort of out-of-the-sun, Apocalypse Now imagery for the front of the box.

Unfortunately for both them and us, the people who have actually programmed the game seem to have been stuck in some sort of time warp for the last five years, and are perfectly content to dish up a game which makes Slap Fight look sophisticated.

Now don't get us wrong, it's perfectly acceptable to produce a top-down scrolling shoot out these days. But there does need to be some degree of innovation, doesn't there? Alas, there is none.

The player launches from his aircraft carrier in one of the most crappy and cynical scaling routines I've witnessed and the has the pleasure of flying over a stripy sea with rocks (or are they clouds, it's tricky to tell) scrolling down at regular intervals. Then, surprise surprise, the player is assaulted from all directions from a bunch of clumsily drawn and utterly unimaginative planes.

It's unfortunate that Dimension Force just happens to come along after the cut-off date, but this sort of ghastly trash just doesn't cut it any more.

☆

FINAL FANTASY 2

Price **Super Famicom £49.99**
Genre **Role Playing Game**
Publisher **Square Software**

The Final Fantasy series arrives on the Super Nintendo in style. In Final Fantasy II, the player is whisked off to a mythical dungeons-n'-dragons world as Cecil, commander of a giant airship battle fleet charged by the King of Baron to recover a set of magical crystals. But when Cecil refuses to do the King's dirty work any longer, he is cast out on an even more perilous mission. All this is told by an elaborate introductory sequence prior to play, and then it's up to you to journey off into the wastelands not just to undertake your mission but also to find out what sinister treachery the king seems to be up to.

Along the way you're accompanied by your pal, Kain, and more characters turn up and join your party as the quest progresses. The main game is presented is top-down cutesy format, with squat little characters and bright, colourful scenery. The simplistic nature of the graphics tends to belie the game's sophisticated nature. It may look infantile and shallow, but in fact it's bigger and more depthy than the vast majority of computer-based RPGs - and it's much easier to get into and learn too.

I'd much rather play this than some stuffy, pretentious AD+D product any day of the week.

For its terrific user-friendliness, depth of gameplay and sheer size and scope, Final Fantasy II gets a definite thumbs-up as one of the tidiest console RPGs to date - even the super-cute graphics do make it a little difficult to take things seriously at times. Definitely recommended.

☆☆☆☆

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL

Price **Super Famicom £39.99**
Genre **Sports Game**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Whooaaaa! Touchdown! That's right, dudes! Madden Mania sweeps the UK in a crazy fit of football bonkerness! And in readiness for the arrival in a couple of months of the official UK Super Nintendo, lots of grey import dealers across the country have taken the rather appealing opportunity of stocking this version of the game that everyone is calling 'John Madden Football'

And not a bad version it is too. Offering the player the chance to be both quarterback (who gets to call the 'plays') and every other bugger in the team in a sort of Kick-Off style fashion. That is, the player throws the ball himself and the computer then automatically switches his control to the man who is nearest and most capable of 'receiving'.

Alternatively, once the player has called the play, he can leave the computer-controlled players to try their best to carry out his instructions. This rarely works as well as you may expect, but is often a better option than meddling and screwing things up yourself.

As you would expect from the Electronic Arts Sports Network, there are more features than you can wave a stick at, allowing you to choose from 29 teams, decide what the weather is going to be like and decide if you want to practise, play a regular season or opt for league play.

It's not quite as slick as the Megadrive version, but still good enough to take the crown as one of the finer games available on the SNES

☆☆☆

JUPITER'S MASTERDRIVE

Price **Amiga/PC/ST £7.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Action Sixteen**

It's a rare occurance indeed that a budget game gets to appear in ACE. But for Jupiter's Masterdrive, we just had to make an exception. Ages ago when UBI soft released the title, it was warmly received by reviewers but sort of got washed away in the spate of top down driving scrollers on the market. Now, at a mere £7.99, the game stands a chance to be a budget scorcher, since there are very few decent top downers around at the moment.

The players have to steer an assortment of vehicles (hover craft, formula one cars, hot rods and the like) around a bunch of different tracks, each taking place on a different planet or something.

Distinguishing Masterdrive from most games of the ilk is the fact that the players can actually blow each other up by using handy roof-rack mounted cannons.

Most of the courses are well designed and provide thrilling racing, but two problems quickly emerge. The first is that in two player mode, the scale of the track contained in the tiny screens is simply too large and the player can't see where he's going. The second problem is that some tracks are utterly impossible, like the ice track which must be negotiated on hovercraft. Bear in mind that many courses have pinball-style bumpers which rebound the craft across the track, and you can see that this can become a bit of a bind.

Still you can opt to avoid this course, so it's not that bad. And the roistering compos you can have with your mates are most enjoyable.

☆☆☆

MERCENARY III

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Novagen**

Since the publication of the original Mercenary on the Commodore 64 back in 1986, the 3D vector-driven adventure game, and those that have followed it, have become cult classics. Since the original, we've had The Second City (essentially a data disk for the first game), the excellent Damocles and now the trilogy is drawn to a close (probably) by the cleverly-titled Mercenary III (subtitled The Dion Crisis). It's bigger, better and tougher than those that have preceded it, with the 3D filled-vector environment that author Paul Woakes is famous more now more sophisticated and believable than ever before.

This time around, the player travels between planets in a bid to unravel a top-level political conspiracy. Interaction with characters now plays a major part in the adventuring, but mostly the gameplay will be familiar to Mercenary fans - travel around collecting objects and using them in the right way. It's not particularly sophisticated stuff, but the realistic environment and the multitude of things to do give the impression that it is, and that's fine by me.

Of course, anybody who enjoyed the earlier Mercenary games won't need to be told that this is right up their street also. Unfortunately, the game's innovative way of doing things, its tricky puzzles, weird sense of humour and overall feel isn't for everybody's taste, so newcomers may want to check it out before taking the plunge. It's definitely worth looking out for, though, as those who have the patience and take the time to get into the game will find it thoroughly absorbing.

☆☆☆☆☆

MYSTICAL

Price **Amiga/PC/ST £7.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Action Sixteen**

Hoorah, what a jolly little game this is. Originally released by Infogrames, this off-the-wall shoot'em-up never really received the recognition it deserved. Now it's out at a more pocket-friendly price, though, it should be able to reveal its delights to a much wider audience.

The player's cast as an apprentice magician who, just before taking his final exams, carelessly mislaid all of the Great Wizard's spells and magic potions. Now, to even stand a chance of earning his pointy hat, he's got to go into the magical lands and retrieve the lot of them. What follows is a slow-moving but nevertheless addictive vertical shoot'em-up with the wizard trotting up the screen collecting the lost spells and doing battle with the myriad of nasties that accost him. Hardly surprising for a game of French origin, it's very bizarre indeed, with lots of completely unexpected aliens (ponytailed girls and big fat milkmaids?) and plenty of on-the-side graphical surprises.

As the wizard progresses, the spells he collects can be used like power-ups against the evil hordes. The aim of the game is essentially to reach the magic pentangle at the end of each level, so as to be transported in a shower of pixie-dust to the next. Truth be told, there's really not that much to it, but it's a great laugh, especially with two players (the second joystick controls a Golem character that jumps on enemies and crashes it). It looks smart, plays just as well and comes heartily recommend to anyone with eight jangly pound coins burning a hole in their pocket.

☆☆☆☆

NINJA GAIDEN SHADOW

Price **Gameboy £24.99**
Genre **Beat-'em-up**
Publisher **Temco**

h no! Not another Ninja Gaiden game! To be fair, this one is better than most. Sure, it's the usual old slam-bang, thank-you-ma'am martial arts action that we all know (too well) and love (sometimes), but the presentation and the graphic quality lift it a little out of the ordinary.

The smart though badly translated intro explains the plot. The evil Demon Emperor Gulf has plans to enslave the whole world's population (starting with New York, would you know it). And with his mighty dark army to back him up it looks like he going to do it, too. That is, until Ryu Hayabusa, last of the noble Dragon Clan, appears on the scene to dispense sword-based justice over five scrolly levels.

As well as the ability to run, jump

and slash, Ryu can also monkey swing along the underside of ledges, shoot a grappling rope up in the air to climb up to lofty platforms and also unleash a special dragon's flame secret weapon if he's collected the right power ups (oh, the game's got them as well).

Yes, as I said earlier the game scores zilch for originality, but it looks superb (there's some great parallax on level one) and plays even better. Beat-'em-up fans disappointed by the low quality of Double Dragon 2 would do well to look here for their thumpin' thrills instead.

☆☆☆☆

PAPERBOY 2

Price **Super Famicom / PC £39.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Mindscape**

Look out! He's back, with an all new route! And, well, that's just about it actually. Paperboy mania swept the arcades and homes of America when the first game appeared way back in 1986. The ker-razy antics of the adolescent delivery boy captured the imagination of the nation, and now fans of the original can enjoy this sequel.

Well, I say sequel. Extension would perhaps be a more appropriate term. There's nothing new in this game that was missing from the original except the ability to ride in both diagonal directions, as opposed to up and left in the first. The routine is still exactly the same; the Paperboy (or girl) gets to ride a number of streets, delivering papers to the correct houses in traditional American style on the back of his BMX, avoiding all those zany problems which anyone who has taken a Saturday job at their newsagent will be only too aware of. Fierce dogs attack the Paperboy and trucks run him over. You get the picture.

Graphics weren't the strong suit of the original, and they're equally sparse here, looking pretty sad compared to most current releases. But then visual appeal isn't the point of the Paperboy games. Instead, their fast gameplay and humour kept people coming back for more. And this title just about manages to deliver an acceptable amount of both.

☆☆☆

ROAD BLASTERS

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Tengen**

Tengen really are the nostalgia kings. While other softcos are converting the latest state-of-the-art coin-ops to Sega's 16-bitter, Tengen are quite content to release conversions of games you could probably buy in their original arcade cabinets for about the same price. Just recently we had Pacmania, now we've got Road Blasters and there are plenty more 'blasts from the past' in the pipeline.

Road Blasters comes as a welcome relief from the stacks of scrolling shoot-'em-ups and platform games. (Just why is the Megadrive so curiously lacking in the driving game department? The only other one I can think of is Super Monaco GP.) As the name suggests, the player drives along a road and... um... blasts things.

The accent is definitely on the blasting. The player's car, which sits at the bottom-middle of the screen, accelerates to top speed automatically and the player simply has to steer it left and right, strafing unsafe road users and roadside gun turrets with his bonnet-mounted machine gun. Super mega whopper weapons are occasionally dropped off (literally) by a jet that swoops down and hovers over the car briefly.

Your appreciation of Road Blasters on the Megadrive will be near identical to that of the coin-op - they're identical. Personally I find the action repetitive and too mindless to be enjoyable for longer than about fifteen minutes, but there are probably many who disagree and think this is the best game ever. At least, that's what Tengen must be hoping.

☆☆☆

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?

Price **Gameboy £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Capcom USA**

Ark! Judge Doom is planning to ruin Toon Town and has already killed the mayor just to prove that he means business. Roger must rescue Toon Town from the terrible fate that Doom has in store and at the same time rescue his wife Jessica from an evil kidnapping plot. And how does he go about all this? He scrolls around Toon town in a sort of graphic adventure cum shoot-out, that's how!

Actually it's not that bad, and there's enough variety in the arcade sequences to make it worthwhile. The horrible weasel henchmen of Dr Doom chase poor Roger around the screen and take pot shots at him, popping out of manhole covers and the most unusual places in order to do him down.

Real fans of the movie will be pleased with the representation of Roger and the lighthearted nature of the whole thing, but real gamers may find that it's a bit lacking in the action department.

There's a reasonable amount of adventuring to do, although this really consists of simply taking an object from one place to another in order to be told to take a different object somewhere else.

The graphics throughout are amusing enough and reminiscent of the film in a rather blocky, black and white sort of way, and the whole thing adds up to just about enough fun per p. And anyway, it's a nice change to see Capcom handling a cutesy product after their interminable run of ball-busting combat shoot-outs.

☆

RPM RACING

Price **Super Famicom £49.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Interplay**

Offroad racing is very much the 'in' thing with driving game programmers of late, and you could well expect the latest product to cash in on the craze to be the best so far, what with it being on the Super Nintendo and all that. Unfortunately, the many faults of RPM (it stands for Radical Psycho Machine, not Revs Per Minute) Racing prove beyond doubt that it doesn't matter how sexy a console may be, the games on it can still be a technical and gameplay abortion.

RPM Racing is very similar in st
and presentation to the GameBo
Super RC Pro-Am, reviewed in Janua
But whereas the handheld game w
fast, smooth and controllable, RP
Racing distinctly lacks these qualiti
Four cars do battle over a series
eight-way scrolling isometric-perspecti
tracks, bouncing over hills and ramp
performing hairpin turns and gen
ally bashing into each other. Much h
been made of the high-resolutio
graphics, which look vaguely like t
Amiga's HAM mode and have allow
for some very pretty definition ar
light-shading on the vehicles as th
bounce about. Unfortunately, it seer
the price we pay for all this technic
wizardry is horribly jerky scrollin
sluggish, almost undetectable car co
trol and, on the whole, slow and fru
trating racing.

Presentation-wise, RPM is slick, offe
ing various car modifications, 120 trac
with 24 difficulty levels and even
course designer. These, however, a
all pretty pointless additions if the ma
thrust of the game isn't up to muc
and so ultimately RPM Racing com
over as the sort of game you'd real
like to have a lot of fun with, but ju
can't because it's so steadfast
unplayable. A real shame.

☆☆

RUBICON

Price **Amiga/ST £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **21st Century Ent.**

In the near future a bizarre nuclea
accident in the Soviet Union (ho h
not a very timely scenario) smothe
an area 300 miles square with intens
radiation. As a result, the wildlife i
the area has been horribly transmu
tated into... well, horrible transmut
tions. And guess who's job it is to g
in and sort it out? Right first time!

Once again the barrel of game sc
narios has been well and truly scrape
as an excuse for this latest blaster fro
the reborn Hewson. It's a pretty uncor
ventional game in the way it's pr
sented - rather than being
constantly-moving affair, the little fell
under your control has to deal wit
the threat on each screen before h
scrolls from left to right into the ne
bit of terrain. It... sort of works in it

own way. It lends a more relaxed, take-things-in-your-stride air to the action, without really making it seem boring. The shooting action is pretty frantic, particularly when extra weapons have been collected, although sometimes the control system gives the impression that success depends more on luck than judgement.

Graphically it's OK, although some of the sprites are pretty crudely defined, and the colour scheme is rather drab and depressing - as befits a post-nuclear landscape, I suppose. There's something about the game - or rather not - that means that, although it looks like it should, it doesn't deliver that all-important playability 'kick'. It tries hard enough, with plenty of variety in the levels and action, but nevertheless it falls just short of the targets it sets for itself. Try before you buy.

☆☆☆

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Price **Game Gear £29.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **Sega**

Well, they said it couldn't be done - but Sega had to go and prove them wrong. Sega's would-be Mario beater has made it onto the Game Gear and it's an impressive achievement. It's so impressive, in fact, that you'll think you're playing a handheld Megadrive! (Okay, so I know that that's a bit of a naff statement but it really is true.)

Everything you remember from the Megadrive game has been reproduced exactly the same but smaller - the oh-so-colourful graphics, the twee tunes, the simple yet addictive gameplay and the amazing speed are all there. The action's so fast that there are times when the Gear's blurry screen makes it's near impossible to see what the Hell is going on! Owners of both a 'Drive and a Game Gear will be pleased to hear that the map layouts are, as they say on TV, "All-New", so if you've beaten the Megadrive game then you'll find new challenge here.

But not much. In all respects Sonic is a classic games bar one - it's just far too easy. Seasoned game pros are likely to have this one cracked well inside a week of solid play. Still, it's definitely one of the best looking carts ever seen on the Game Gear and as long as you don't mind the short-lived nature of the fun then it's well worth your dosh.

☆☆☆☆

SUPER FIRE PRO-WRESTLING

Price **Super Famicom £49.99**
Genre **Beat-'em-up**
Publisher **Human Creative Group**

Conveniently hitting these shores on import at more or less the same time as the WWF craze, this latest Famicom product must surely rank as one of the smelliest to date. On paper and on screen it looks and sounds great - 3D isometric ring, big musclebound characters slugging it out, single-player and tag-team options, loads of different moves... mouth watering yet? Well it needn't be, because Super Fire Pro-Wrestling is about as playable as a stale watermelon wrapped in a wet towel.

So what's so bad about it then? Well, it's difficult to know where to start, really. The wrestlers themselves shuffle about the ring in such an unconvincing manner that they don't even look like they're walking on the canvas. They seem to float about a foot off the ground, with their legs kicking back and forth in a vaguely walk-like manner. When the two fighters meet, they grapple in an equally unrealistic fashion while the players hammer away on their buttons to try and get a hold and execute a move. Theoretically there's lots to do, but the graphics are so poorly defined and the controls so unresponsive that, bar flashes of luck, it's virtually impossible to do anything but the most basic moves. Maybe it would have been a bit easier to get to grips with if the on-screen messages had been in English, but they're not so it isn't.

No doubt some hardened wrestling fans will throw caution to the wind and snap this up, but a much better plan is surely to wait a while and see what emerges over the next few months - there's already an offiical WWF game on the way which promises to be a lot better. Whatever you do, don't waste your hard-earned money on this claptrap.

☆

ULTIMATE GOLF

Price **Amiga ST/PC £7.99**
Genre **Sports Game**
Publisher **GBH Gold**

Well, hardly. Since Gremlin's Greg Norman-licenced game claimed to be the last word in golf simulations, it's been proved wrong many times with the likes of PGA Tour Golf, Links and the excellent Microprose Golf all beating it hands-down in the realism and fun stakes.

But that's not to say that 'Ultimate Golf' is bad. Far from it, and now that it's out at a more respectable price it should be looked at seriously by any avid on-screen golfers who haven't already done so. As golf games go, it's certainly one of the most comprehensive on the market, but some sloppy presentation, and maybe a little over-enthusiasm to put in so many factors, has led to it being rather unfriendly and difficult to get to grips with.

Actually, the game's slightly deceptive about how much there really is to it. There may be all these lovely options and variables, but there are still only two courses to play on, and that's pretty poor by the standards of other games, which offer anywhere between four and six. Any golf game's longevity is determined by the number of courses available, and two just doesn't cut it, I'm afraid.

Whatever, there's a good eight quid's worth of golf action here for those who like their sport sims a bit on the intensive side - even though anybody looking for a seriously good introduction to the genre would be better pointed in the direction of PGA Tour or Microprose Golf.

☆☆☆

WAYNE GRETZKY'S ICE HOCKEY 2

Price **Amiga /PC £25.99**
Genre **Sports Simulation**
Publisher **Bethesda**

Hey! Hey! Hey! It's Waaaaaaayne Gretzky! Boy! With his name on the game you know it's got to be good. Well, actually I don't know who the heck he is and I wish I didn't know much about this game. It bored me stiffer than a corpse left on an ice block.

The accent is firmly on simulation. (A bit of a bad move this, in my opinion, as done correctly ice hockey would make a great supra-violent action game.) Before matches the player can fiddle about with his team member's stats to his heart's content, training them up, booting duff players out and recruiting college rookies in. Chances are, though, that you'll not want to because all this stats jiggery-pokery is carried out on some of the drabbest menu screens I've seen this side of a spreadsheet.

The actual hockey matches are played out on top-viewed horizontally-scrolling ice rink, where tiny emaciated groups of pixels gyrate about in a vain attempt to simulate the ruckin' high-octane sport that is ice hockey. Even with the woeful graphics this could've been decent fun, but the poor control makes it feel like you're controlling somebody else controlling the players rather than being in the hot seat yourself.

Drab, dull and no fun to play, this is one hockey game that should be iced as soon as possible.

☆☆

And there we have it. A rather small number of new releases for a whole month, we agree, but that's very much the way of things in the spinning maelstrom of light and power known as the computer industry. One minute you expect something to happen and the next minute, it doesn't. Or maybe it does. It all depends on what you least expect at any given time.

still available

A320 AIRBUS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Thalion**

You what? Alright, it's not as if we have any problem flying high in an F-16 or blowing up radar installations in a state-of-the-art stealthfighter - but the A320 Airbus? Is somebody pulling our pilsner? Well, apparently not, as this is one of the biggest releases from German software house Thalion in quite a while. Rather akin to a computerised Jim'll Fix It, the game allows the player to be an airline pilot for a day - well, for however long he likes, really - at the controls of the little-known A320 jetliner.

As anybody who knows anything about aviation at all will expect, A320 Airbus is no simple game. Passenger jets are impossibly more complicated than the fighter planes that have mainly been the subject of simulations in the past. Thalion's game has attempted to simulate the spaghetti-like complexity as accurately as possible - and for the most part it succeeds, although this hyper-realistic approach is unlikely to appeal to the majority of flight-sim gamers. All those knobs, dials and readouts may be a bit too much for the average Joe Shmoe.

A320 Airbus isn't just about flying about a bit, though. Oooh, no. Players get to create their own pilots, take part in training or active duty, work out flight plans and generally make their way up the ladder of commercial aviation. For those that find this sort of thing appealing, there's no doubt that A320 Airbus is actually very good indeed. It's professionally-produced, apart from the occasionally ropey graphics, and though it's not exactly immediate or instinctive, the rewards are there to be had for players willing to plough the manual and learn all the ins and outs. The only problem is, I can't quite imagine who's going to be that interested, when you think about all the other, considerably more action-orientated, flight games on the market today. It's just horses for courses, I suppose.

☆☆☆☆

ACTION PACK

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Compilation**
Publisher **Action 16**

Wot a bargain! Ten games - *Colorado, Cosmic Pirate, Eliminator, Fast Lane, Hostages, Maya, On Safari, Rotor, Sherman M4, Targhan* - for twenty-five quid! Okay, we'll be honest and admit that they're all getting a bit long in the tooth now, and more than a couple of the games on offer here are real Xmas turkey material (*On Safari*, in particular, should be plucked, stuffed with Paxo and bunged in the oven for a good five hours as soon as possible).

However, *Cosmic Pirate* (a supah brill multiway scrolling shoot-'em-up), *Eliminator* (a 3D shoot-'em-up cum driving game) and *Hostages* (a multi-part arcade adventure) more than compensate, and would make a superb value compilation on their own. The other games are poor to middling in quality, but for the price you really can't complain. Highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

AEROSTAR

Price **GameBoy £24.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Vic Tokai**

What do you get if you cross a platform game with a vertically-scrolling shoot-'em-up? A bit of a bloody mess, that's what. Aerostar is a seven-stage blaster where the player has to guide a spaceship along an enemy-held highway. The player can fly into the air for a very limited time to avoid ground fire and hop over gaps in the road, but this makes him vulnerable to attacks from the air. And, of course, there's a plethora of juicy power-ups to be collected along the way that turn the player's craft from something only a little more threatening than a slap in the face into the starship world's equivalent of the 'King of the Beach'.

The idea of combining blasting and bouncing is theoretically good, but unfortunately in practice it doesn't work so well. The player 'jumps' by holding down one of the GameBoy buttons, and the longer the button is held down the longer the jump. Thing is, the GameBoy's design makes it difficult to fire at the same time without taking one finger of the jump button, resulting in the ship plummeting into an abyss. And as the road sta rts narrowing, and the need for jumping becomes more frequent and the enemy's attacks become more vicious, this becomes particularly annoying.

As it stands, Aerostar is a nice stab at something a bit different, only marred by the slightly clumsy implementation. Worth a look, though, if you're interested by the sound of it.

☆☆☆

ALIEN BREED

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Team 17**

Alien Breed can best be described as the *Aliens* licence that should have been. It grafts Aliens atmosphere onto *Gauntlet*-esque gameplay to create an addictive - albeit unoriginal - winner. One or two players can take part simultaneously, and their job is to run around the six plan-viewed maze-like levels of a monster-infested space station, blasting seven shades of slime out of anything that crawls, slithers or lurks.

Fortunately the problem that always afflicted *Gauntlet* (i.e. though fun, there was no real aim to playing apart from scoring points) has been averted by giving the players a task to complete on each level (normally of the 'find a location and blow it up' nature). Okay, so it's not exactly lifting the game into Arcade Adventure territory, but it's provides enough of a goal to keep the player coming back for more.

The addictive gameplay is backed up by some super-slick scrolling and graphics (although the animation is a little perfunctory), and the term 'arcade-like' is very appropriate here. Throughout the use of sound to create atmosphere and tension is superb, especially when the station's self-destruct sequence is kicked in and the player has to find the exit before the place blows. The only real gripe is that given that the game is for 1Mb Amigas only, you can't help feeling that something slightly more ambitious could have been attempted. But as it stands this is the best straightforward blast for months, and that's a good enough recommendation for anyone.

☆☆☆☆

AMNIOS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Psygnosis**

Hooray! *Defender* for the 90s! Well, that's the idea. The shame is it doesn't *quite* work.

Amnios is a plan-viewed multiway scrolling shoot-'em-up. The player zips around the surfaces of ten living planets in his ship, zapping the bad guys and rescuing the trapped humans. By shooting certains pods the player can upgrade his ship with better weaponry.

And that's it. It's that simple. Of course, with this sort of game you're not looking for depth - you're looking for action. And in this respect Amnios does pretty well. The scrolling is smooth, sound suitably raucous, and the graphics have an attractive organic/mutated look to them.

Trouble is, I didn't really feel much compulsion to work my way through the first world, let alone the tenth. Control over the ship isn't quite as 'reflexive' as it should be, and this detracts from the fun badly. Not my cup of tea, but it may well be yours. Give it a look.

☆☆☆

ANOTHER WORLD

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **US Gold**

Explore a mysterious alien world in this peculiar polygon adventure from Delphine. Taking the role of Lester the scientist, the player is transported - as a result of an experiment gone wrong - into an alternate universe where nothing is what it seems. Joystick controlled with relatively little interaction between characters, Another World is a flawed, but brave product.

Although there aren't that many problems to solve and actually the interest in the game is more connected with the look than the feel, it's still a worthwhile purchase.

Overall, it's an impressive game. It's got plenty of drawbacks but on the whole, it scores a big plus. For players looking for a new angle on the arcade adventure genre and in particular anyone who has a stronger interest in new graphic styles than the depth or longevity of their game, it fits the bill perfectly.

☆☆☆

BABY JO

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **Loriciels**

Imagine Mirrorsoft's *Brat* in two dimensions and you've got a good idea of what the latest import from French firm Loriciels is all about. Or if you don't know *Brat*, try imagining *Mario* with a nappy-wearing babby as the main character. It's all really rather ludicrous, with the teeny toddler having to eat the bonus goodies as he bounces along the landscape in order to keep fit - but he mustn't eat too much, or he'll mess his nappy! I mean come on! What are these French games designers on? Something pretty strong if the quality of Baby Jo's aesthetics are anything to go by. Poorly designed sprites, atrocious music and hideously jerky backdrops are all proof of Baby Jo's naffness, but it has to be said that it is kind of cute in a rather perverse and definitely strange sort of way.

But if there's one thing it certainly isn't, it's fun - the slow, annoying gameplay and hastily thrown-together design makes sure of that. It's for precisely this reason that Baby Jo should only really be on the shopping list of platform freaks desperate for a new fix - and even then there are much more playable options available.

☆☆

BARBARIAN II

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Psygnosis**

Psygnosis games have historically always been visual treats held back by some less than excellent games design. However, with *Lemmings* that all changed and the company justly earned themselves a reputation for being able to turn out top-notch software of both high visual standard and demanding gameplay.

And for a moment it looks as if Barbarian II may be another title in the Lemmings vein. Unfortunately, this is patently not the case, since once the player has got through the obligatory loading sequence (a whole disk's worth) it becomes clear that Barbarian II is neither a vista of beauty for the eyes, or a particularly great place to explore with a joystick.

With left-right scrolling with paths leading into and out of the screen, objects to collect, weapons to horde and monsters to despatch, Barbarian really doesn't offer the player anything new, and has been carried off to much better effect in both *Gods* and *Torvak the Warrior*. Shame.

☆☆

BATTLE ISLE

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Ubi Soft**

As strategy games get trendier and more diverse, with the likes of *Populous, Mega lo Mania* and *Sim City*, the latest from French firm Ubi Soft represents something quite different, which we hardly see any more these days - a wargame in the classic vein. It's set on a far-off world where two armies do battle for control of a series of islands. It's vaguely similar to the old SSI wargames - units move in turns across a battlefield broken down into hexagonal zones. More experienced gamers will know the sort of thing.

Due to the space-age scenario, the units involved consist of all manner of high-tech tanks, planes, ships and armoured vehicles as well as more conventional infantry battalions. Players move their units about, creating tactical formations and assaults, with the inevitable confrontations between opposing forces. As the battle goes on, units must be resupplied, tactics altered and all the other guff that goes along with a game of this type.

Battle Isle's most favourable option is the two-player mode - something that's woefully missing from a lot of strategy products these days. A handy split-screen display allows two mates to play head-to-head - although this does mean you can see what your opponent is up to at any time, of course.

Battle Isle is undoubtedly a fine and very 'deep' strategy game, and one that should appeal to anyone who likes the good old-fashioned ways of doing things, without all the interfering bells and whistles. But despite the game's accessibility, many younger players on the lookout for a brain game are more likely to steer towards the likes of Populous II. Good stuff, though.

☆☆☆☆

BIRDS OF PREY

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Well, it's been four years in the making, but at last Hawk - oops, I mean Birds of Prey - has touched down. But has it been worth the wait? Well... sort of.

Let's make no bones about it, Birds of Prey is an excellent flight simulator and, as the name suggests, there's no shortage of dogfighting action. On a technical level it's astounding, and probably its more impressive aspect is the number of planes you're given the opportunity to fly - no less than 40 individual combat aircraft!

Birds of Prey is much more the thinking-man's simulation - very much in the MicroProse mould - and not really the more simplistic, combat-orientated Interceptor-type affair that many of us were expecting. That said, it's not all just flying from waypoint to waypoint and falling asleep in-between. There's more than enough hard-nosed action to keep anybody happy. The 3D update is surprisngly okay, considering how much the program is having to juggle, but somehow it just doesn't seem like the result of four years' programming.

Ultimately, what you've got with Birds of Prey is a game that's tried to do a bit of everything and comes off surprisingly well at the end of it. If anything it leans a little too far torwards the technical side of things (reading the manual is an achievement in itself), but nevertheless Birds of Prey comes wholeheartedly recommend to all flight-sim fans.

☆☆☆☆

BREACH 2

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Impressions**

Though there's nothing particularly special on offer for die-hard RPG fans this month, the follow-up to the highly-successful Breach is worthy of their attention. Set in the future with the player in command of a team of space

marines, it's more strategy than role-playing, but the mix of the two genres is an appealing one. Probably the best comparison is with that old favourite *Laser Squad* - Breach 2, however, boasts a considerably more sophisticated approach, with a smart isometric viewpoint, much easier command control and more involving missions.

In each mission scenario, the player leads his team through enemy territory, exploring rooms, collecting objects and doing battle with the alien hordes they encounter. In the classic RPG tradition, characters can be tooled up with a huge array of weapons and equipment, including rifles, rocket launchers and bombs, and all the characters come complete with individual attributes and abilities.

An added boon is that, should the player get bored with the multitude of missions available, they can create and edit their own. How many gamers will want to expend this amount of effort (designing a playable mission on any kind of game is no easy task) remains to be seen, however, and you may want to ask yourself if you're ever likely to make use of the feature. But there are enough predesigned missions to make Breach 2 worthwhile even without the editor, and on that score the game should at least be on the 'take a look' list for all RPG/strategy afficionados, if not a definite purchase.

☆☆☆

BUGS BUNNY CRAZY CASTLE 2

Price **Gameboy £24.99 (Import)**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Kemco-Seika**

Who the Hell is Honey Bunny™? I must be getting old, because I don't remember Bugs™ ever having a soppy girlfriend. It sounds to me like a lame excuse to rehash the old 'girl kidnapped by witch who must be rescued by hero' scenario to me. In this case it's the hideously ugly Witch Hazel™ who's the wrong doer (now her I do remember), and who has whisked Honey™ away to her castle. Bugs™ must rescue her by hunting through 28 huge rooms of platforms, pipes, ladders and Looney Tunes™ characters. Bugs™ must find the hidden keys in each to unlock the door to the next room. By picking up bombs, axes and so on Bugs™ can blow up those darn 'Toons, hack his way through blocked passages, etc, etc .

Although it looks like a platform game, Crazy Castle 2™ actually plays more like a puzzle game. Success is down to using the items you pick up along the way to get past certain obstacles at the correct place and time. And this part of the game is quite fun.

It's the platformy element that ruins the game - Bugs™ moves in big chunks and is hard to control, and all too infuriatingly often you lose a life by bumping into the baddies by accident. Despite it's good graphics, in my opinion Crazy Castles 2™ is a right stinking load of old Crap™.

☆☆

CAPTAIN PLANET

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Action**
Publisher **Mindscape**

Pass the lentils, man. Thanks. Yeah, like I was telling you there's like this guy, right, and he's like this sort of super-hero, you know. Goes around saving the world from these real heavy breadhead polluters. Yeah, like you say. Heavy shit, man. Anyway, he's got these five helpers, and they're like just kids, you know, but they've got this special rings that give them these cosmic powers. Totally amazing. Each level of the game like centres around one of these six characters, and they're just far out.

I mean like the first character, Ma-Ti, uses her ring to like chill out the bad guys and regrow plants so she can climb up to the level exit. Yeah, and like when she gets out there's this helicopter she has to fly around in and scoop up endangered elephants and take them to a sanctuary. Yeah, exactly. It's like this amazing mix of platform game and shoot-'em-up. Mmmm, yeah, the graphics are sort of cute, the scrolling's fine, and the tunes are neato, but control over your little sprite guy's a bit tricky. Yeah, Tricky Dicky. Watergate. All The President's Men. But you get used to it and all in all it's quite a far-out experience, if not the slickest thing like you've ever seen. Lots of really pretty psychedelic colours, too.

☆☆☆☆

CASTLEVANIA IV

Price **Super Famicom £49.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Konami**

I couldn't believe it when I loaded this up! Imagine it's Christmas (not that difficult really). You're really looking forward to getting a certain present, and you've laid the ground with lots of heavy hints to your parents. Then, on Christmas morning, you get a wrapped gift that looks the same size and shape as the the thing you want. Trouble is, when you open it up there's something totally different inside. Oh, it's a nice enough present all right, just not the one you wanted. Well, that's Castlevania IV. It was great on the NES, brilliant on the Gameboy and, along with CapCom's *Super Ghouls n' Ghosts*, was one on the big anticipated releases on the Super Famicom.

To be fair, Castlevania's a decent enough game - there's lots of running around platforms, ladders and what have you, lots of wopping the bad guys with a giant mace. Unfortunately, what there isn't lots of is fun. The graphics are garish, and the animation is merely perfunctory, with the hero having a rather unfortunate shuffling walk that makes him look as if he's got rags tied to his feet and he's trying to polish the floor. If this had appeared before *SGn'G* then it might have received a better reception. As it happens, it didn't, so it hasn't.

☆☆☆

CELTIC LEGENDS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Ubi Soft**

It's amazing how you can tell, 99% of the time, what an RPG game is going to be vaguely like just by knowing what part of the world it's coming from. For example, anything that comes from California is likely to be all complex and involved, while anything from, say France or Germany, while still having all the traditional FRP elements, always tends to present things in a much more simplistic and arcadey manner. As is the case here, with this little Gallic number which is very much in the same vein as Thalion's *Dragonflight* and countless other Euro RPGs.

It's actually a fine little game, based around all the old RPG cliches, but handling them with traditional French style and aplomb. It's all set in the mythical world of Celtica, where the misuse of magic by an evil sorcerer has wrenched the kingdom in twain.

What follows is a mix of strategy and conventional RPG elements presented from a number of viewpoints - on the battlefield, high above the world itself and so on, depending upon the scene.

Though in gameplay terms it offers nothing that seasoned fans of the genre will find particularly earth-shattering, it's different enough in terms of presentation and style to make it well worth investigating - especially for novice gamers who may be looking for an accessible and appealing introduction to the genre.

☆☆☆☆

CENTURION - DEFENDER OF ROME

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Cast as an aspiring Centurion, it's the player's duty to both defend the homeland and expand the Roman Empire as far afield as possible. This megalomaniacal aim is somewhat foiled at first by the fact that the player starts with just a single legion of soldiers and a city of citizens to keep under control.

The game is a well-judged blend of icon-driven strategy and arcade-style interludes. For example, to keep the subdued provinces happy, the player can take part in chariot races and keep taxes light. As the game progresses the armies under your command grow and ships placed at your disposal to take armies to neighbouring shores become bigger and better. If the player's lucky he can even have a crack at seducing the voluptuous Cleopatra. Poor old Megadrive owners in particular are starved of this type of game, so if you're looking for something to exercise your brain a little, you could do far worse than this.

☆☆☆☆

CHOPLIFTER 2

Price **Gameboy £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Nintendo**

Choplifter first appeared in 1983 via

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Broderbund and is still fondly remembered today. The player's mission as super-crack helicopter pilot is to rescue survivors from a horizontally scrolling warzone. To do this the player must land near the waving refugees and wait for them to board. This can be quite harrowing at times as you're a proverbial sitting duck for all the enemy gun installations and machine-gunning planes which constantly lay siege.

The player's copter is equipped with a rapid-firing cannon and a limited number of bombs with which to protect himself. And that's really all there is to it - however, like *Defender*, Choplifter is one of those games that, once played, is never forgotten. Fast action, challenging game task and a password system help make this one of the best games out on the Gameboy, and a must for any action fans collection.

☆☆☆☆☆

CISCO HEAT

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Image Works**

In the light of a whole bunch of driving games, some of which have been nothing short of excellent, (*Lotus 2*, *Grand Prix*) Image Works' launch of this rather dreadful title couldn't have come at a worse time.

Not only will the consumer have had his fill of driving in general, but he will also be fully aware that it's possible to produce auto-action games a thousand times better than this.

The aim is to race a souped up police car through the hilly streets of San Fransisco, avoiding taxi-cabs, trams and skyscrapers in an attempt to emerge as the top cop driver in the city.

Quite aside from the 3D routines which make *Turbo Outrun* look polished and some astonishingly dull courses, Cisco Heat stalls at virtually every corner. The races themselves are painful and frustrating, the crowd graphics are basically a single graphic block duplicated to fill the space, the police car crashes into skyscrapers only a fraction larger than itself, and the corner turning routine, however brave the attempt, is a catastrophe.

Mind you, the sound of the car's horn is quite good.

☆

CIVILIZATION

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **MicroProse**

American games design guru Sid Meier, fresh from his success with the brilliant *Railroad Tycoon*, has surpassed himself with this latest effort, which can truly be said to boggle the mind in terms of depth, scale and scope. Adopting the same functional top-down presentation format of *Tycoon*, the game charges the player with the task of building a civilisation, from a bunch of primitive settlers in an unexplored, uncharted world, to a global empire capable of space travel, nuclear power and the other trappings 20th Century life.

The range of factors and elements that play a part in the game is quite simply awesome, as the player's people advances and expands, founding cities, setting sail across the water, making technological discoveries and building armed forces - all while computer-controlled 'rival' empires do the same. Along the way the player must set taxes, maintain civil order, negotiate with other nations, care for the environment and take part in various arms and space races.

Civilization is undoubtedly the most involved strategy game ever conceived, and as such many less commited or novice gamers are likely to be swamped by the game's maze-like intricacies. For those willing to invest the time and effort, however, Civilization pays off like no other. Wonderful.

☆☆☆☆☆

CONAN THE CIMMERIAN

Price **IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Role Playing Game**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

The problem with Conan is that he doesn't really know whether he wants to be a serious game or a funny game. The opening sequence is a mixture of pratfall comedy and intended menace, accompanied by some of the most awful music I've ever heard. (While some people may argue it's fashionably dissonant, I reckon it sounds like the twangings of a Fisher Price "My First Guitar" being played in the bath.)

Anyway, the curious mixture of semi-plan view exploration and side-on hacking works reasonably well, with Conan looking every inch the super-hero he's supposed to be. And there's plenty to explore.

Even the adventuring side is pretty good, and Conan can interact (albeit on a pretty basic level) with every character he encounters.

So if you feel that there is space on your shelf for yet another revenge-quest game, and can live with the atmosphere-crushing laughs, it may be worth a look.

☆☆☆

CRUISE FOR A CORPSE

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Delphine/US Gold**

The plot for Cruise for a Corpse is firmly rooted in the Agatha Christie 'isolated location, plenty of suspects' crime story tradition, detailing how the player is invited to a Greek tycoon's yacht for a well-earned holiday only to get there and find his host bumped off by an unknown murderer. Before you can say 'Inspector Wexford' the player is forced to don poncy moustache and tufty sideburns to solve the heinous crime.

After a lot of pre-release interest from the press, there were high hopes for Cruise for a Corpse. Is it the excellent game everyone seemed to think it's be? Well, yes... and no. In the graphics and sound department it's exemplary, with large, fluidly-animated sprites moving over exquisitely detailed backgrounds and plenty of suitable tunes and samples playing away in the background. All conspire to generate an excellent sense of mood and atmosphere.

The player directs his on-screen character ('Raoul') via the mouse. By clicking the mouse pointer on objects of interest, a menu appears listing the various things the player can do with the selected item (i.e. 'Open' or 'Examine' hat box). Movement around the yacht is effected by walking Raoul from location to location by clicking on exits to the current location, such as doors or hallways, or more quickly by calling up the yacht map and 'sending' Raoul immediately from place to place. As a user interface it's difficult to think of another as intuitive and easy to use.

The major problem with Cruise for a Corpse is its pace. The animation, though wondrous, is slow. Examining the contents of a room can become quite painful, as Raoul slowly turns, walks, turns, bends down, examines the item only for a message to appear stating that "There is nothing of interest here". Equally annoying is the frequent though inevitable accessing and swapping of five (count 'em) game disks. All too often the player's enthusiasm for clue hunting can be severely dampened by the reduction of the game's speed to near snail's pace. Less important, some of the generally excellent French-English translation is a bit dubious in places, such as the Cabin Boy who is described as "dynamic".

Those comments apart, anyone with the patience to sit through the occasional doldrums will find Cruise for a Corpse a superb buy, heaped with quality presentation and atmosphere and presenting a big enough game task to satisfy even the greatest sleuth.

☆☆☆☆

DEATHBRINGER

Price **Atari ST £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Empire**

There's this sword, right. These evil wizards have magically given it the ability to absorb the souls of anyone it slays. Their intention is to use it to get rid off their goody-goody though thicky-thicky nemesis Karn, a barbarian so stupid he can't even spell his own name right. However, luck isn't on the wizards' side, and the sword finds its way into Karn's calloused hands. Hardly believing his luck, Karn sets out to give the sword back to the wizards - in style. Basically it's all a thinly-veiled excuse for a sideways scrolling bloodfest of hacking and slaying, with Karn plowing through wave after wave of bizarro monsters.

Deathbringer boasts some of the most impressive parallax-scrolling backgrounds yet seen, even if they are somewhat lacking in colour. The sprites are well-drawn with a nice line in humour, but they're rather garish in a monochromatic sort of way. But despite its good graphics and adequate sound, Deathbringer's real problem is that it's basically a bit dull. The combat moves are limited in range and slow to implement and just wandering along, end-

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lessly plugging away at the baddies, is not all that interesting. And the prettiest backdrops in the whole World can't make up for that. *Barbarian III* this ain't.
☆☆☆

DEVIL CRASH

Price **Megadrive £39.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Tecno Soft**
Computerised pinball has never been a particularly popular genre - and a quick glance at Devil Crash is enough to make you see why. Ever since the age-old days of *Slamball* and *Time Scanner*, coin-ops and home machines have tried to emulate that seedy tilt-n'-slam pinball feel, but with little success. In theory, it should work excellently, with the binary format allowing for all sorts of tricks and wizardry that wouldn't be possible on a real machine. Unfortunately, no amount of gimmicks can make up for the fact that pinball on a computer screen just doesn't compare to the exhiliration of a real table.

To its credit, Devil Crash actually does a better job than most, with credible ball inertia and plenty of interesting features - the table is some three screens long and packed with all manner of secret rooms, bonuses and other bits. Unfortunately the gothic nature of the graphics (pentangles and mystic runes aplenty) lend a rather depressing and messy feel to the game itself, and as a result it's difficult to really enjoy. Devil Crash is the aesthetic equivalent of a bad headache. Whatever its shortcomings, however, computer pinball has acquired a respectable cult following for itself, and gamers of that persuasion will no doubt find Devil Crash to be one of the more impressive examples of the genre. For the rest of us, however, there are more enjoyable - and less frustrating - bits of plastic on the market.
☆☆☆

DEVIOUS DESIGNS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Image Works**
Hmmm, not so much devious as simply fiddly. Ever since the world went *Tetris* mad, there's been a steady trickle of arcade puzzlers trying to tap into that elusive addictive ingredient that made Alexey Pajitnov's classic such a wallet-filling money spinner. Devious Designs had more potential than most, but it hasn't quite been realised.

The basic idea is simple enough. The player guides a tiny figure around various landscapes, picking up variously-shaped blocks and trying to slot them onto a transparent template, whilst collecting bonuses, a myriad of power ups and avoiding or shooting the swirling bad guys. All well and good. Ah, but there's more to it than that. On the later levels, the player can make his character walk up the walls and even on the ceiling. And this is where it all starts to fall apart.

Control over the player's character is generally fine, but when near a wall it's all too easy to find yourself clambering up when you didn't want to and not clambering up when you did. Admittedly, given a fair deal of practice the player should be able to compensate for this fiddliness, but in the short-term it mars an otherwise enjoyable and reasonably addictive addition to the genre.
☆☆☆

DOUBLE DRAGON 3

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Storm**
Double Dragon fans have been more than short-changed in the past by the conversions of the previous two Double Dragon coin ops, so it comes as some relief to be able to say that this - the third instalment of the on-going fisty-cuff escapades of Jimmy and Billy Lee - is, despite a couple of reservations, pretty much what devotees have been waiting for.

The plot is confused to say the least. According to who you listen to, it's either the usual girly rescue mission, or a quest for treasure, or a fight against the 'Ultimate Evil'. No matter - the mechanics remain the say. Jimmy and Billy Lee (a.k.a. players one and two) have to fump and crump their way through fourteen levels of action set in five exotic locations (and as the game progresses you'll discover 'exotic' is an understatement).

Players start the game with fifteen 'coins', and in the shops found en route the player can buy extra lives, weapons, power ups and even some fancy new fighting moves. It's a shame you can't just find weapons along the way, but this coins business does at least adds a game-enhancing strategy element, because the player has to decide how best to spend his cash.

While some may find the gameplay dated and repetitive (a complaint, to be fair, that could be made about most games of this type), those eponymous 'fans of the genre' should be revelling in one of the more exciting and certainly the slickest slices of beat-'em-up action around. And, for my money, it's far better than *Final Fight*.
☆☆☆☆

E.A. HOCKEY

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Sports Arcade**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**
Like *Kick Off* with fighting in, Electronic Arts' Hockey will appeal to everyone. A section of teams from around the globe, each wit their own abilities and weaknesses battle it out in the Ice hockey World League.

Following on from their success with *John Madden's Football*, EA pull yet another winner our of the bag with this, perhaps their most frenetic title to date.

Having selected the length of game, whether the player wishes to compete in a one-off match or a knock-out, selected his team and that of the enemy, it's game on! Skating around the rink is simple enough, and control over the puck is surprisingly instinctive. Since the rink is so small and the players can move so swiftly and violently against each other, Ice Hockey is an extremely rapid, high scoring game. Basically, whoever gets the puck from the face-off is most likely to score. Until, of course, the player gets the hang of the wide variety of tackling moves available to him, from a good honest going-for-the-puck scenario to a full body check.

Rile an opposition player on a too-regular basis, though, and you'd better be ready to put your fist where his mouth is, as one of the features included is brawling. While the rest of your team are trying to do some good, it's possible to clang away at that guy who skated over your shoes for as long as you like! A graphic and gameplay marvel, E.A. Hockey is wholeheartedly recommended to one and all. Hooray!
☆☆☆☆☆

ELF

Price **Amiga £25.95**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Ocean**
As Cornelius the Elf, it's the player's task to rescue his sweetheart Elisa from the pointy-nailed clutches of Necrilous the Not Very Nice. The game takes place over six Tolkien-esque levels filled with platforms, pitfalls, ladders and bridges. Cornelius' magic powder allows him to protect himself from Necrilous' rampant horde of henchcreatures by firing bolts of magic energy. Numerous interest-sustaining spells and power-ups can be bought from Ye Olde Localle Shoppe using cash picked up along the way.

Each massive maze-like level presents its own unique set of problems to solve and tasks to achieve, requiring that the player constantly evolve new strategies to deal with them. All in all Elf is a polished high-quality romp, perfect for platform or arcade adventure fans.
☆☆☆☆

EPIC

Price **Atari ST £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Ocean**
Boy, has this one been a long time in the making. I can remember magazines breathlessly previewing this about a year and a half ago (and I think ACE was one of them). It's strange that it should finally appear around the same time as EA's *Birds of Prey* (see this months Review Directory), another game thought long lost in the Bermuda Triangle that is known as software development.

Anyway, it's here now so what's it like. Well, to be frank, it's a tiny bit disappointing. The last remnants of the human race are all bundled up in a fleet of space ships, fleeing through space to escape the sun which is just about to go nova. The only escape route lies through the heart of the hostile

Empire of the Rexxons, a vicious reptilian race of aliens. As pilot of Earth's Tip Top Secret starfighter, it's up to the player to see the fleet to safety.

This plot forms the framework for the game's eight missions, some of which take place in space, the rest of which take place on the surfaces of various planets. Although depicted in super-smooth solid-polygon 3D (courtesy of Digital '*F-29*' Image Design), the emphasis is fimrly on shoot-'em-up rather than spurious simulation.

Depending on how the player performs in the various missions, the plot varies accordingly, but it's very limited and never really deviates from the linear path. Epic is all very exciting - the sheer scale of some of the space battles is stunning - and control over the ship is superb, but you can't help wishing there was a little more to the game than just blowing everything up. A touch more depth and this would have been a classic. Still, if you're looking for a high-class, no-nonsense 3D blaster then Epic's your game. Personally, I'm holding out for *Epic 2*.

☆☆☆☆

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER 2

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **SSI/US Gold**

The first Eye of the Beholder, along with its inspiration *Dungeon Master*, can largely be thanked (or held responsible, depending on your view of this genre) for bringing RPGs spluttering and staggering out of the darkened bedroom of the anorak-- and glasse-wearing social retard and into the bright daylight of critical acclaim and public acceptance.

This style of RPG banished forever the notion that these games should only consist of functional graphics and reams of statistics, depicting the action in detailed 3D graphics, with all the number-crunching handled by the computer rather than the player.

Beholder 2 continues the tradition of the first, being good to look at, easy to use and - most importantly - fun and exciting to play. To be honest, the real improvements over the first game are few and subtle, and it's still a shame that the various beasties son't have a few more animation frames lavished on their attack animations, but that won't put off the fans keen to resume their adventures in the land of Darkmoon, nor should it deter newcomers from making their first trip. Highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆☆

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Simulations**
Publisher **MicroProse**

MicroProse make a departure from their usual rigorously-accurate sims with this action-orientated affair. It's the flight sim equivalent of the Janet and John books, i.e. nice n' simple with no complications. Players have six combat arenas to choose between, each with various missions to select. These missions are nearly all simple 'get in, destroy a couple of targets and get out alive' jobs, with the player have to simultaneously defend against swarms of enemy jets. Control is via keyboard, joystick or mouse and is highly responsive in each case.

The screen update is fast enough but there are quicker 3D routines about - it's more than adequate for the job in hand, however. Sound is disappointing, with a white-noise hiss being being the player's only audio companion for most of the journey. In the gameplay department this is a winner, with plenty of white-knuckle action to get the adrenalin pumping. Veterans may bemoan the game's lack of depth, but anyone else should find this just their cup of tea, with a yummy Jammy Dodger in the saucer to boot.

☆☆☆☆

F-22 INTERCEPTOR

Price **Megadrive £39.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

The first "real" flight simulation to arrive on Sega's 16-bit baby is, as many might expect, a whole lot more simplistic than comparable products on computer. The drill is pretty much routine - strap yourself into the cockpit of your prototype fighter and kick some butt over a series of increasingly-dangerous missions.

Because console controls are far more limited than those available on com-

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VISA Access

puter (no keyboard you see), F-22 doesn't offer all the technical bits and bobs featured in your average Microprose product. What it does do, however, is play surprisingly like a "real" simulation, given the limitations of the controls. When playing from one of the outside views, it may look like just another version of Afterburner, but it really does play properly, with cannons and missile targetting all working realistically.

Considering it's a console game, F-22 Interceptor is a pretty remarkable achievement, and EA deserves to be congratulated for making the effort to produce something a bit more taxing (both for the player and the machine) than just another two-player shoot'em-up. If you're used to what computer-based flight simulations can do, it's unlikely you'll be impressed by what F-22 Interceptor has to ffer. If you're not, however, and you're a bit fed up with the standard Megadrive arcade drudge, you could well be onto a winner here.

☆☆☆☆

FACE OFF

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Sport Game**
Publisher **Krisalis**

There aren't that many Ice Hockey games available on the Amiga. In fact, there aren't any. So Face Off is something of a welcome addition to the canon of sports games. Worth getting? Well, yes and no. Like *Manchester United Europe*, it's a very polished game, with some super slick menu and option screens. There's a league to participate in, where the player can do anything from train the players to rename the manager. And like *MUE*, the player can turn off the arcade game and concentrate on the managerial side of things if they're that way inclined, or alternatively just play the arcade game alone.

The arcade side of things is okay, although some may wish the action had just a touch more zip. Certainly compared to *E.A. Hockey* it's distinctly sluggish. Control is simple and easy to pick up - shoot, pass or thump via the joystick - and the sport is fun, especially when things get a little physical and the fists start flying. As standard on most sports games these days there's a replay function so that that blistering goal can be replayed again and again. Overall, Face Off is a rounded package, though unlikely to exactly grab the public's imagination. Fans of the sport will enjoy it, but just how many of them are there in the UK?

☆☆☆☆

FATAL REWIND

Price **MegaDrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Psygnosis/Electronic Arts**

Psygnosis disappoints nobody with its first foray onto the 16-bit consoles, maintaining the same high quality of graphics and sound that's made it the legend it is in the Amiga market. And thankfully in this case there's the gameplay to back up the visuals. But if *The Killing Game Show* had to be renamed for its transition from the Amiga to the MegaDrive, couldn't they have come up with something a little better than Fatal Rewind? Apart from the fact that it doesn't actually mean much, it's a fairly obvious attempt to sound like *Total Recall*, a film which bears no resemblance to this game at all.

The player is put in charge of a mechanical walker reminiscent of the ED-209s in *Robocop*. An agile little thing, it can run left and right, jump, fire and even climb up the sides of walls. Things they can do nowadays, huh? The player has to negotiate a network of platforms in the hunt for the exit to the next level. Aliens fly on from all sides, swirling and swarming about the screen with the sole intent of seeing the player bite the dust. And just to give the player a touch more incentive to escape the platforms are slowly sinking into a deadly red sea. The need to find keys to certain areas adds a small amount of depth to the game, but these arcade adventure elements never swamp what is basically a very classy and addictive shoot-'em-up.

☆☆☆☆

FIGHTER COMMAND

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Impressions**

It may be a little late to cash in on Operation Desert Storm, but there can be no doubting Fighter Command's topicality. Set in the present day Middle East, it puts the player in the shiny shoes of an allied air commander who's been given a simple task - kick the stuffing out of the aggressive enemy as quickly and violently as possible. But despite the pretty picture of a jet pilot coming into land on the box, there's not actually any flight-sim type action in the game at all. It's 100% pure strategy, with the player making all his decisions from a series of control rooms, screens and offices. Everything is presented by simplistic overhead camera views, tactical screens and radar displays.

Everything you'd expect from a military strategy game is in there - you sweep the area with reconnaissance satellites to find out where everything is, then organise and launch attacks against chosen targets. There's a wide range of kit available, including stealth bombers, fighters and helicopters from various air forces along with exocet, patriot and scud missiles. As the game progresses, the player has to keep tabs on political developments, fuel and equipment resources and all kinds of other factors which govern the game world.

Actually, considering there's rarely anything really exciting going on on-screen, Fighter Command does quite a good job of holding the player's attention. Most of the screens are static, nothing's really very immediate and it takes time to learn the basics, but despite all this it's still strangely compelling. There's plenty to do, lots of strategy to get the head round and generally it's all very jolly. The lack of any real flight action is a major setback, and it's because of this that many gamers may prefer to wait for Microprose's forthcoming *ATAC*, In The Works'd this month.

☆☆☆

FINAL BLOW

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Storm**

I actually went to a boxing match a couple of months back and people in the crowd were genuinely shouting "Hit him!" as if it was some sort of useful tactic which their chosen fighter should employ. One suspects those are exactly the sort of folks who spend more than a couple of quid on Final Blow in the arcades. Nothing wrong with the celebration of the noble art, and nothing wrong with having a right old clanging session in the process, but Final Blow has more to do with seeing who can hit Fire the fastest than boxing.

Although the players are endowed with plenty of moves and the ability to block punches, the speed of the game completely removes any sort of finesse which, after all, is what boxing is all about. Even Mike Tyson would concentrate on different areas of the body. Hit them in the ribs enough to make them lower their guard, and then go to work on their face. No such accuracy in Final Blow, since the flurry of computerised and human arms makes it impossible to see who's arms are who's. The result is a non-stop battle of stick-slamming frustration. About the only way to work out who's being hit is by watching the energy bar at the bottom of the screen.

So far as a coin-op conversion goes, it's a pretty good job, and in two-player mode it's alright for a laugh, but the original was far from perfect. Amiga owners may be wise to hold on for a more rounded game.

☆☆☆

FINAL FIGHT

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **US Gold**

Yet another in US Gold's seemingly endless string of CapCom conversions. In Metro City (loosely based on Noo Yoik) all is not well. Crime is rife and to make a bad situation worse the Mayor's right-dreamy daughter has been kidnapped by - you guessed it - Mr Big. (This old Mr Big certainly gets around, doesn't he?) The player and optional partner have to fist-fight their ways through the city's wastelands to rescue her. Why? Why not?

Final Fight is something of a first for beat-'em-ups on the home computer, i.e. it's actually quite good. The sprites are large and decently animated, the background scroll is smooth and the action is fast. Someone of the detecting whether a punch connects or not is a little dodgy, but apart from that this can be recommended unreservedly to anyone who fancies a little aggro without bruising their knuckles.

☆☆☆☆

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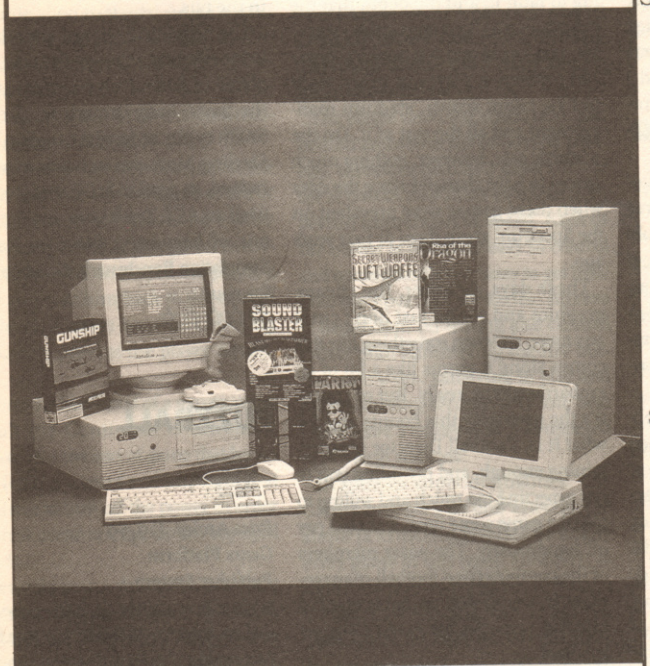

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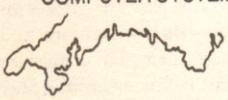

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FIRST SAMURAI

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Image Works**

This is the way that arcade adventures should be made! Succeeding in producing a game with the steriod-power of Schwarzenegger and some puzzle-solving too, Image Works have come up with a winning formula.

The player must avenge the foul murder of his Ninja Master by chasing the evil Demon King through 24th Century Japan.

On top of all the regular hacking ans slashing that you would expect to find in an arcade adventure, there are Special Items, which can be used a little like playing a joker in It's A Knockout and can summon the spirit of your murdered Mage-mate to help you though some of the more tricky situations.

While it could be said that the last thing the world needs is another martial arts game or another collect-the-objects adventure, First Samurai carefully sidesteps the argument by blending both styles in an effective and appealing way, keeping both hardcore killers and those with more cerebral intentions happy.

☆☆☆☆☆

FLICKY

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Sega**

"Don't be put off by the screenshots on the back of the box" is probably the best bit of advice I can give about Flicky. It looks awful - tiny primary-colour sprites and garish backdrops. And to be honest, things don't improve much in the game itself. However, like Quasimodo, an ugly appearance conceals the goodness inside.

The player controls the tiny bird of the title. The lickle darling's chicks have gone and got themselves lost in the rooms of a giant cat-infested house. Flicky has to run and jump about, collect her scattered brood and take them to the safety of the Exit, while avoiding the prowling felines. Flicky is a wonderfully playable game, very simple but packed with fun. Some may dispute whether there's £35-worth of fun, but for those with the cash it's a good purchase.

☆☆☆☆

FLOOR 13

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

The myth that strategy games are boring has been well and truly exploded by a game that's likely to convert even confirmed trigger-addicts to a more staple and intelligent software diet. Floor 13 offers a new slant on the strategy genre by basing itself around a compelling scenario and offering gameplay that goes beyond the regular strategy framework.

Set in present-day Britain, it tells of a government-run secret police force that must avert scandals, wipe out subversive elements and generally protect the government from embarrassing incidents so that it doesn't fall from grace. As Director General of this corrupt agency, the player is solely responsible for its operations.

The game is played almost entirely from a single static screen of an office desk, onto which intelligence reports and newspaper stories arrive from the outside world and form the basis of the information which the player works from as plots and storylines unfold. Various sub-departments, such as surveillance, interrogation and disinformation are the instruments of the player's will, with shady agents tailing suspects, tapping phones, searching premises and even torturing and killing people to achieve the government's immoral aims.

The way in which the game reveals information as half-clues and red herrings mean that good detective work and thorough cross-checking of intelligence data is as important as the conventional strategic skills which are also required. It's all thoroughly absorbing, very realistic stuff, and comes highly recommended, even to those who can't normally stand strategy games.

☆☆☆☆☆

FOOTBALL DIRECTOR II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **D&H Games**

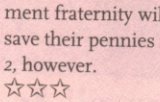
Yaaaaaawn. Don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against football - there's just something implicitly boring about management games of this type. Player Manager is the exception to the rule, firstly because it's so excellent and secondly because you got to play *Kick Off* with it, which made it doubly excellent. When faced with something like this, though, it's difficult to imagine anybody but the most desperate sort of gamer or die-hard footy fan actually getting any enjoyment out of it.

Technically of course, there's nothing to fault it, and the depth that the game goes into is commendable - you've got your league and cup trophies, financial problems, player injuries, team tactics, talent scouts, stadium management and all the rest of it. On the aesthetic side, however, nothing much seems to have changed since the days when these games were prevalent on the Spectrum about three or four years ago.

These days, however, the cheapo graphics and sound just don't cut it any more, do when something like this comes along it seems like a bit of an embarrassment, really. But of course it's the gameplay that counts and for what it is, Football Director is entertaining enough, and providing you're not expecting too much and willing to give the game some time, it should pay off handsomely. The wiser members of the computerised football-management fraternity will probably want to save their pennies for *Player Manager 2*, however.

☆☆☆

FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX



Price **Atari ST/Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Racing Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Believe you me, you've never seen a racing game like this. *Lotus 2? OutRun Europa? Indianapolis 500?* Pah! They are but children's toys compared to the complete and utter excellence of Formula One Grand Prix, the latest and greatest game from the programming genius that is Geoff '*Stunt Car Racer*' Crammond. The graphics are truly amazing, with highly-detailed cars (complete with driver's helmet poking out of the cockpit) literally zooming around tracks lined with stands, trees, fences and cranes. The sound matches the visuals, with good use made of throaty samples for the engine.

But it's not just the quality of the graphics or the sounds that makes F1GP so special, it's the meticulous attention to detail that generates an authentic and involving Grand Prix atmosphere. Everything you'd expect to find on a Grand Prix circuit - stands, bridges, tunnels, etc - is there (and in the identical position they'd be found in real life), even extending right down to stewards pushing crippled cars off the track and engineer crews waiting in the pits.

The wonderful control over the car is the essential icing on the cake, with plenty of difficulty modifiers to make the game easy enough for Granny Smith to play or tough enough to bring Sterling Moss out in beads of sweat. Indeed, so good is F1GP that it earned itself an ACE Trailblazer and the honour of becoming the new Racing Simulation Benchmark. Good enough for you?

☆☆☆☆☆

FUZZBALL

Price **Amiga £19.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **System 3**

Well, this is a bit of class from the past and no mistake. Refreshingly free from pretension, System 3's latest is a simple yet hugely addictive platform affair. The player controls a bouncing ball of fluff that has to be guided around a network of platforms, collecting fruity bonuses. Enemy sprites, the Fuzzballs of the title, try to stop him. These come in four increasingly-aggressive 'flavours': green, purple, black and red. By repeatedly shooting them with his blob gun, the player can stun them long enough to knock them off the platform. However, if the player takes too long the Fuzzball comes to but even nastier than before.

As the player progresses through the fifty-odd levels more and badder Fuzzballs appear, unkillable monsters start bouncing around and the platform leaps provide an even greater test of the player's pixel-perfect positioning powers. Fuzzball is a classic example of 'simple being good'. The addictive, uncluttered gameplay and cute graphics make this an A-grade

winner. And there's a right dreamy animated intro to boot. (Well, you've got to fill those big boxes with something, haven't you?)
☆☆☆☆☆

GALAGA '91

Price **Game Gear £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Import**
Arrrrggghh! You filthy, wretched, sucking little alien bastards! Anyone who played the original *Galaga* in the arcades, or better still the BBC version called *Zalaga* from Aardvark will be thoroughly versed in the extreme temper tantrums the induced.

However, in these incarnations, the game had that elusive spark of sheer addictiveness that meant no matter how many times that nigh-on invisible alien bullet destroyed the player's craft and sent him back to the start of the level, it never became annoying enough to prevent the player returning.

Here, the likelihood of a gamer using up all his Continues is extremely remote. It's the sort of game that leaves you feeling so mad and impotent that you have to turn off the power in order to wreak some revenge on the buy-eyed fiends.

Nevertheless, a top-notch scrolling shoot-out this is. Not quite as good as the superb *Halley Wars*, but boasting an infinite number of levels (with simply an increasing number and ferocity of aliens) and some entertainingly learnable flight patterns, it's not bad.

It's basically the nth derivation of the Invaders/Galaxians theme with jazzier aliens and graphics.

The main problems lie in the fact that the player can only have two bullets flying on the screen at any one time, and the annoying habit the aliens have of circling at the bottom of the screen, killing the player who makes the mistake of thinking that he's satisfactorily dodged an attack.
☆☆☆

THE GAMES - WINTER CHALLENGE

Price **IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Sport Simulation**
Publsiher **Accolade**
This is, as our rad friends would say, mega-wicked! It appeared in the post, totally unexpected, and turns out to be one of the best games we've seen this month! Yeah, seriously! The player (or players - up to ten can take part) compete in eight winter sports - luge, downhill skating, cross-country skating, speed skating, bobsled, giant slalom, biathlon and ski jump. All the events are depicted in an effective mix of 3D polygons for the landscape (a bit like *Midwinter*) with sprites for the competitors and course scenery (trees, fences, etc). Sound is less impressive - on a basic PC the game is played almost in silence except for a between-game tune and a crowd cheer when a player completes an event.

The player views the action from just behind and above his on-screen alter-ego, therefore getting a good view of the action as well as an excellent first-person impression of speed. Each of the events is relatively easy to control and consequently very easy to get into. Like the Epyx *'Games'* series, success is dependent on timing and control rather than hammering the fire button, so it's very satisfying to play and makes shaving seconds off those best times more a matter of skill as opposed to physical stamina.

Despite its superior qualities, The Games may get a bit dull when played alone (a criticism levelled at nearly every game of this type). However, as a game to play with a group of friends it's near flawless - and that makes The Games a more than worthy purchase to play over this Xmas holiday period.
☆☆☆☆☆

GREAT NAPOLEONIC BATTLES

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Impressions**
You've got to laugh. The shots on the back of the box tell all about a product like this. "Create new battlefield with over 150 terrain pieces" says the caption under a picture of some grass and bushes. "Franch infantry advance on Reves" says the one under the picture with some green squares with crosses on.

But if you're sniggering, you shouldn't, because impressions certainly know how to put together a top-notch historical wargame, even if they can't draw graphics to save their lives.

Great Napoleonic Battles offers the player the chance to become Napoleon himself, or the commander of one of the unfortunate territories to fall under his control.

Impressions games are war/strategy games in their truest sense operating on a hex grid, with all the hit-point ratings and defence abilities displayed in their ugly numeric forms, but they are sure to keep happy the gamer who simply wants a machine to do the adding up and look after all the imagination, sound and action in his own head.
☆☆☆

GUNSHIP 2000

Price **IBM PC £39.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**
Nobody writes simulations like Microprose does. This is a highly-realistic sequel to the company's earlier mega-hit *Gunship*, which has gone done in software history as one of the best-selling sims ever. This sequel is far more than just *Gunship+*. Every part of the game has been given a radical overhaul.

Probably the most impressive aspect is the revamped graphics system. Using a sort of patchwork-quilt landscaping technique, the gameworld has been modelled in exacting detail, complete with rise, hills, mountains, valleys, cuttings. If it's a geographical feature, it's there. As usual, the game takes the form of a series of pilot-testing missions. Unfortunately this complexity means that you really need at least a 16MHz PC to get anything approaching speed from the game. Sound with a board is marvelously atmospheric, and adds no end to the gritty battlefield feel.

The 'copter control is good, but actually getting the craft to fly matches that of the real thing, i.e. it's very difficult, and certainly makes Gunship 2000 not the sort of game to cut your simplaying teeth on. However, if you're looking for the ultimate chopper simulation, then here it is.
☆☆☆☆☆

HARD DRIVIN'

Price **Lynx £34.99**
Genre **Racing Simulation**
Publisher **Atari**
The Lynx catalogue of software keeps getting bigger and bigger, and - more importantly - the quality of the games keeps getting better and better. Hard Drivin', a conversion of the Atari coin-op, is a case in point.

Potential buyers expecting or hoping for *Pole Position 3* are going to be disappointed - this is a pretty successful attempt to simulate the controls and performance of a 'real' car, and as such it's slightly more difficult and much less forgiving to drive than yer usual arcade auto.

The action takes place on one of two courses, a Speed Track and a Stunt Track (complete with jumps and loop-the-loop). Once these have been tamed the player can try racing against the Photon Phantom.

The graphics and sound are nothing short of incredible, accurately reproducing the look and feel of its coin-op Big Daddy. Along with *S.T.U.N. Runner* this is a real showcase for the power of the Lynx.

It takes a little while to get used to Hard Drivin' on the Lynx - the joypad is a poor substitute for a wheel - making the going tough at first, and some may find the difficulty combined with the lack of immediate pulse-racing thrills boring. However, once the player has got the hang of things they should find Hard Drivin' remarkably satisfying. Recommended.
☆☆☆☆

HARD NOVA

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**
Hard Nova's a game that's difficult to categorise. Like *Starflight 2* it's a mixture of styles, boasting strategy as well as role-playing elements, adventure as well arcade space-flight sequences. It's the sort of stuff that Electronic Arts in America have been churning out for years - science fiction odysseys with alien worlds, sleazy mutant characters, big spaceships clanging together and all the rest of it. There's supposedly a comic edge to this one, with the player taking on the persona of wisecracking

space bitch Hard Nova.

You can interact with characters, RPG-fashion, collect objects, do missions and trek across the galaxy, kidnapping, ferrying cargo from planet to planet and so on and so forth.

It sounds like a bit of a cop out, but if this sort of malarkey is your cup of tea, then you're liable to have a lot of long-lasting fun with it - it's just a shame that the vast majority of gamers don't have the patience to get into it. Well worth checking out - the game's got plenty of atmosphere (ho ho!), and gets progressively more involving the longer it's played. Just don't expect to pick it up straight away.

☆☆☆

HARE RASING HAVOC

Price **PC £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Disney/Infogrammes**

Phwoar! The idea of a game based around Who Framed Roger Rabbit's stunning cartoon opening sequence does indeed sound like one tasty prospect - but sadly, Disney has realised little of its great potential in this rather dull little game.

On paper at least, it sounds like the cartoon's outrageously-frenetic spirit has been captured. Roger's been entrusted with looking after the accident-prone Baby Herman, and must ensure nothing happens to him while his dragon-like mother is out of the house. But Herman's disappeared to the local dairy to sample their milky wares, and Roger must track him down before any harm comes to him.

Sounds like fun? Don't let appearances be deceptive. The only thing that Hare Raising Havoc manages to do is infuriate the player beyond measure with its unfriendly control, illogical puzzles and repetetive gameplay.

On each of the screens thar Roger encounters, there's a problem to be solved, which involves manipulating the surrounding scenery and objects . To be honest, it's not very taxing and the player more often finds himself fighting agsinst the unresponsive control and slow, drudgy animation than actually getting to grips with the puzzles. With the Disney Sound Source connected you get samples of the original movie characters' voices and SFX - but these quickly become every bit as annoying as the game itself. Only die-hard Roger Rabbit fans need apply.

☆☆☆

HEIMDALL

Price **Amiga (1Mb) £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Core Design**

After a long string of shoot'em-ups and platform games (*Car-Vup*, *Frenetic*, *Chuck Rock*), Core Design has returned to more involving territory with Heimdall, an isometric arcade adventure cum role playing game based around Viking lore.

The Heimdall of the title is a human gift from the Gods, sent to Earth by Odin to recover the three great weapons that will vanquish the forces of evil. After selecting a crew from the varied characters available, Hemidall sets sail across the Nordic waters to destinations unknown.

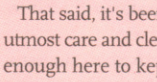
For the most part, the game is yer basic isometric adventure à la *The Immortal*, although there are some interesting strategic and FRP elements - all the characters have differing skills, which means that the player must switch between them, as in a conventional RPG, to perform certain tasks. The strategy is provided by the seafaring section, where the player must travel between the various islands (there are three archipelagos, each hiding one of the ehtereal weapons and each forming an independent level) in the most efficient manner.

Heimdall is a fun adventure game, although the action, due to the product's FRP overtones, is a little slower and less exciting than most of its counterparts in the genre. In fact, there are times when very little seems to be happening at all, and only those who are willing to buckle down, make maps and all the rest of it, are likely to enjoy the game to the full.

That said, it's been designed with the utmost care and cleverness, and there's enough here to kep anybody glued to the screen for some considerable time. A fine game.

☆☆☆☆☆

HUDSON HAWK



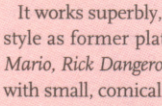
Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Ocean**

Bruce Willis' film was a disaster, and Ocean hadn't turned out anything of note in the film conversion stakes for quite a while, so nobody was really expecting very much out of Hudson Hawk. But instead of the usual cynical and barely-playable licence, what we got was the best platform game so far this year. Special FX took a big gamble in its interpretation of the film by chucking 99% of the source material out of the window, and getting on with the business of just building a good game around the film's basic premise - that of a cat burglar stealing valuable artifacts from around the world.

It works superbly, in much the same style as former platform classics like *Mario*, *Rick Dangerous* and *Switchblade*, with small, comical characters playing over tortuously-designed platform levels. It's a class act, without a doubt, with fiendish traps and pitfalls lurking around every corner. The gameplay is easily up to console/arcade standard, and the graphics and sound really do enhance the fun factor because they're so jolly. Don't be put off by the shoddy licence connotations - Hudson Hawk is a brilliant game in its own right and deserves a place in your collection. Today.

☆☆☆☆☆

HUNTER



Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Activision**

It's a sad old world, this one we live in. Just when poor old Activision get some decent product together, their Mediagenic daddy goes and pulls the plug on them. Now, however, after the aforementioned 'decent product' has been swilling around doing very little indeed for the last few months, Activision's current putter-outer of games, The Disc Company have taken it upon themselves to let another trickle of gameyness reach the streets.

Hunter is the sort of game that you dream of playing. A polygon based action strategy game will all of the usually associated nonsense removed, it offers all the "wouldn't it be great if..." features which should, by rights, be included in all these games.

Taking the role of the Hunter, the player must travel around a bunch of islands, systematically destroying all enemy installations in whatever way he sees fit. Your particular mission is detailed in a briefing where specific, immediate targets are detailed by your allied commander.

The best thing about Hunter is that there's no messing about. If you want to infiltrate an enemy base, get a disguise and you're away! If you want to get about, steal a helicopter/jeep/truck or sailboard. It's all so easy and because the unnecessary complexity of basic tasks has been removed, the player can concentrate on progressing with the mission much more intently.

Excellent graphics and a fast-paced storyline can only add to Hunter's already awe-inspiring style. A winner.

☆☆☆☆☆

THE IMMORTAL

Price **IBM PC £30.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

It's over a year now since The Immortal appeared to great public acclaim on the Amiga. A masterpiece of animation and game design, it was probably responsible for selling a fair few 1Mb upgrades. At last it's made it's way on to the PC, and now features a couple of new enhancements that make it any even better game.

The majority of the game is identical. The player guides a superbly-animated wizard on his travels around an isometric-3D dungeon. As he progresses around the corridors, he discovers treasure, traps and - of course - terrifying monsters. In the original Amiga game, the fairly complex combat took place at the same scale as the rest of the game (i.e. small) and it made judging responses to the opponents lunges and feints a touch difficult. On the PC, however, when combat occurs the view switches to a close-up that makes things far easier.

The only gripe from a PC owners point of view is that having been spoiled by the recent plethora of 256-colour games, the 16 on display here are a little disappointing. However, this doesn't seriously detract from what is an otherwise excellent game, and recommended without hesitation to anyone who fancies a bit of dungeon n' dragoning.

☆☆☆☆☆

JIMMY WHITE'S

'WHIRLWIND' SNOOKER

*Price.***Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Sport Simulation**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Archer Maclean, veteran programmer of *IK+* and *Dropzone* is probably the last person you'd expect to write a snooker sim. Cue games have been around since the beginning of computer gaming - a few coloured shapes, some angle-of-deflection algorithms and away you go. But even with the advent of 3D graphics, none of them have really had any element of realism, until now.

The table is viewed from behind the cue ball so the player can line up shots as if on a real table. The view can be rotated through various axes and zoomed in on so the player can see from virtually every angle conceivable. The ball movement is accurate, without balls stopping for no apparent reason or going off at peculiar angles.

Two player games are the best, but four levels of computer opponent are available for the lone gamer. As the player progresses more sophisticated tactics can be incorporated, like positional play. Swerve, stun, screw and every type of spin are all possible, and are vital for snookering opponents. The end result of JWWS's comprehensive and realistic approach to recreating snooker is the most authentic sports simulation to date.

☆☆☆☆☆

KNIGHTMARE

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Mindscape**

Knightmare, based on the children's TV series of the same name, can best be described as *Captive* with new graphics. The similarities are hardly surprising - both were written by Tony Crowther, the man who has been responsible for more games than Mr Waddingtons.

And, as anyone who has played *Captive* will realise, this is not such a bad thing. The action is depicted in bitmapped view-down-the-corridor 3D, with the player able to move around the puzzle- and monster-strewn-labyrinths with ease. It's not partiuclarly original or ground-breaking, but anyone who enjoys a good RPG - and *Captive*, in particular - will be more than happy with this.

My only aerious quibble is whether kiddy fans of the TV show will find its slightly cerebral nature appealing.

☆☆☆☆

LOTUS TURBO CHALLENGE 2

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Gremlin Graphics**

A worthy successor to the excellent *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*, this game has a number of interesting differences to its predecessor. For a start, it's a better one-player game, but not so good for two players. Technically superior to the original, there's nevertheless something just a little bit lacking. Perhaps it's the removal of the laps system, or perhaps it's the fact that crashing into the other cars really doesn't do you that much damage. But whatever, it ain't quite as good.

However, it IS a great deal better than 80% of the driving games on the market, and there's a Link-up option allowing up to four players to race at once. The action is fast and furious and the control the players have over their cars has been greatly improved.

Players must blast their way through a selection of stages, each boasting a particular hazard, whether it be natural (snow, rain, sand) or man-made (enormous juggernauts rumbling across the road). Graphically superior to the vast majority of similar titles, Lotus just looks the business, with flashy trackside obstacles and a high level of detail on the cars themselves.

Despite being hampered by some aggravating deceleration whenever the player drives through any water and the flawed two player mode, Lotus 2 is a pretty impressive game.

☆☆☆☆

LAST NINJA 3

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **System 3**

Well, well, well. After everyone has been shining up their shoes at the prospect of giving System 3's much

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touted, much lorded and much delayed conclusion of the Ninja series a right old kicking, the bleeding thing turns out to be great!

Applying a more arcade-adventure angle to the tried and tested Ninja formula, the boys at the System have produced a game which has all the visual appeal of the first two games in the series and none of the problems. Well, that's not quite the case, but instead of the game relying so heavily on the fight routines which, to be honest, were never that good, the emphasis has been moved onto the puzzle-solving element which isn't half as hard to implement.

Spanning an epic quest across a bunch of different zones (earth, air, fire, water and void) the game continually throws up different puzzles which the player must solve in order to reach the next stage.

Aside from completing these puzzles, there's a fair amount of rucking to be done too, and the collectible weapons add enough novelty to ensure that even when the player is doing over his twelfth adversary of the level, he'll find something new to do.

Graphically, the game is really rather special, with the isometric landscapes at a stage which must surely be approaching the state of the art, and the animations of the characters themselves being undeniably fine. Just look at the speed blur on that.

☆☆☆☆

LEISURESUIT LARRY 5

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Sierra On-Line**

He's Larry Laffer! She's Passionate Patti! And they're in a whole lot of trouble! Leisure Suit Larry 5, the latest instalment in the impossibly successful adventure series chronicles the spying adventures of America's favourite lounge lizard.

In what promises to be the most sexy adventure in the series, the player must guide Larry and Patti through a world of porn and mobsters in the quest to keep good honest smut on the airwaves. Initially taking the role of the audition host of America's Sexiest Home Videos, Larry quickly becomes embroiled in a hairbrained underworld plot to get all porn off the normal market and drive it underground where enormous profits can be made.

It's all pretty standard point and click stuff, but this time the player alternates between the very different personas of Larry and Patti, allowing both to get into sexy scrapes and also avoiding and particularly severe cries of "Sexism!" from bendy liberal wets.

Again, the hand-painted 256-colour graphics and game design are an excellent splint for what occasionally lapses into a bout of pretty lame gags. However, this time Larry does have moments of absolute brilliance, and the continual promise of a further saucy pic of a top spy in a saucy pose is enough to keep you coming back for more. No? Well, please yourselves.

☆☆☆☆

MAD TV

Price **IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Strategy.**
Publisher **Rainbow Arts**

My, what timing! Only weeks after the big TV franchise debacle and as the country quakes in dread at the threat of a load of old Spanish comedies and crappy game shows filling our screens, Rainbow Arts produce a game which is all about running your own TV station! If only the geezers at TV-AM had the chance to play Mad TV, they might still be in business.

Not only is Mad TV a right laugh, allowing the player to have total control (with the only limiting factor being the budget) over an entire TV station, but it's an excellent strategy game into the bargain.

The aim is to keep Mad TV at the top of the TV ratings while simultaneously winning the heart of Betty, the most beautiful woman in town. Taking place in a huge skyscraper, the game has the player's character haring around from the various offices, buying up films, scheduling programs and keeping an eye on the all important viewing figures.

Every now and again, your boss will crop up and give you some helpful pointers. He may be keen that his station win an award for poncey art films, so it's up to you to schedule accordingly. Now all of this would be a good enough hoot on it's own, but when you consider that Mad TV is a pretty excellent strategy game with complicated interrelations between various departments and some top notch presentation to boot, you would have to conclude that you'd be mad, ha-bleeding-ha, to miss it.

☆☆☆☆

MAGIC GARDEN

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Electronic Zoo**

Good God! Whatever next. Having been plagued for months by an apparently never-ending stream of ceramic gnomes, we were understandably keen to get our hands on the game which they promote. And what a peculiar concoction it is.

In his endeavours to become 'the most efficient gnome', the player must guide a gnome around the eponymous magic garden doing, well, this is where it becomes a little bit unclear actually. He can do pretty much whatever he fancies. He can water the flowers. He can mow the lawn. He can use some magic seeds and fly around on the back of a big dragonfly! But the gnome must be careful, for there are terrible traps which live in the garden like big flowers which can hurt him or tall grass which can slow him down.

And Gnomey had better be careful with the number of objects he's carrying, or he will become too tired and get hit by lightning and die. But the gnome won't get hit by lightning if he is exploring the underground caverns where the toilet is! Gnomey can flush the toilet for extra efficiency.

Presented in side-on elevation, the game looks, plays, smells tastes and is just odd. It's as odd as anything I've ever seen in my life. Peculiar Beatrix Potter style graphics and gameplay which quite honestly is tricky to imagine appealing to the masses make Magic Garden a true enigma.

☆☆

MARTIAN MEMORANDUM

Price **IBM PC £35.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Access/US Gold**

Once again a game pretends to be an 'interactive movie' and turns out to be little more than a simplistic adventure with flashy graphics and sound. But in Martian Memorandum's case the aesthetics are enough to make up for the game design's shortcomings - or at least they seem to be for the first few hours. The game uses digitised video footage, sampled speech and film quality music to set the scene (the story casts you as a futuristic private detective who must travel to Mars to track down the kidnapped daughter of a famous industrialist), and it works very well, creating a strong sense of atmosphere and involvement.

But as is so often the case with games of this type, the effect of these flashy gimmicks soon wears off and when you actually buckle down to play the game you realise that there isn't really that much to see or do. An ardent adventurer could easily complete it inside of a week, because the linear game design means that it's almost impossible to go down the wrong track - it's as if you're being guided by an invisible helping hand, and that's not very satisfying. Both *Rise Of The Dragon* and *Heart Of China* offer similar and more satisfying experiences, so if you've got the PC muscle to run so demanding a product, you'd be well advised to check either of those out instead.

☆

MEGAFORTRESS

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Mindscape**

The trouble with games based on taking every single role in a big, stupid old plane like the B-52 is that virtually every role is mind-numbingly boring. I mean, who honestly wants to plot their course across thousands of miles of terrain using a 3D terrain mapping computer or have to fiddle around with ultrasound frequencies in order to jam the enemy's radar?

The aim of the game is to pilot a battle-scarred B-52 across both Iraq and the Soviet 'Union', keeping the location and aim of your mission utterly secret until the awesome tonnage of firepower can be unleashed on the target. Unfortunately, for all it's gung-ho packaging and intent, Megafortress is just a very good simulation of a rather dull business. Far more fun can be had in any of a host of more recently released flight games, and Microprose's Stealth Fighter series even offer similar creep-up-on-the-enemy antics for

those players who are especially keen on that sort of thing.

Perfectly competent both graphically and on the play front, Megafortress has missions designed by real B-52 navigator and best selling author Dale Brown, although it's one of those games that I guess you really need to have experienced the real thing to appreciate.

☆☆☆

MEGA LO MANIA

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Image Works**

Released amid a bunch of God-sims that are still coming thick and fast, Mirrorsoft's offering has fared better than most, steering sufficiently clear of the Big Daddy *Populous* while not being afraid to borrow little bits here and there where appropriate.

Set in an alternate universe, Mega lo Mania is all about the quest for power. Power over a set of worlds, each made up from a suite of islands, to be precise. New worlds are formed and intelligent life is placed upon them, upon which interstellar freeloaders descend and try to seize the reigns of power for themselves.

The conflict arises, needless to say, when more than one freeloader takes a shine to a particular island. Since each area can only have one ruler, a campaign of imperialism begins, with each player trying to use the forces at his disposal to overthrow the others.

Each island exists within its own time period, and the rate of development, intelligence and so on of its inhabitants is governed accordingly. Players quick to invest time in invention and the refining of natural elements, rather than simply running around hitting the others with sticks are more likely to succeed.

☆☆☆☆☆

MEGATRAVELLER 2: QUEST FOR THE ANCIENTS

Price **IBM PC £TBA**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Empire**

This latest UK release from American software team Paragon is none too surprisingly a sequel to *MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy*. As before, the player leads a team of five space adventurers through toil and trouble to (hopefully) riches and fame. This time around, the player task is to find a way to halt the flow of toxic slime emanating from a mysterious set of ruins left by a dead race called the Ancients. But are they dead? That is up to the player to find out...

Sporting high-quality 256-colour VGA, this is certainly a treat on the eye, and the ears as well with a suitable sound card. The game itself is an RPG in the *Ultima* style, but not half as rigorous - which for many will be more than a blessing. The story is fun and involving, with plenty of sub-tasks to perform that provide welcome and often amusing relief from the main plot. If one has a minor niggle it's that the space combat - which you'd think would be the most exciting part of the game - is flat and dull, with little sense of player involvement. In summary, highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

MEGA TWINS

Price Atari **ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **US Gold**

There's big trouble in the land of cutey things. A dark shadow, etc, etc, has fallen across the land, and it's up to the two sweetest and most unthreatening warriors ever to grace computer software to save the day. At its core Mega Twins is a platform game - one or two players guide their cutesy heroes through level after level of ledges and chasms, seeing off the attacking monsters with a lunge from their tiny little swords. Magic orbs can be found along the way that act as super weapons, which are particularly useful against the super-tough end-of-level nasties.

As a conversion of the CapCom coin-op Mega Twins is hardly startling, but it's competent enough. Apart from the slightly turgid pace of the action, the main thing that prevents Mega Twins from making any real impression is the lack of excitement. There are no real thrills on offer - the platform element is minor, and having to endlessly tap fire to jab the beasties into oblivion is hardly opening up whole new vistas of tele-visual entertainment. The

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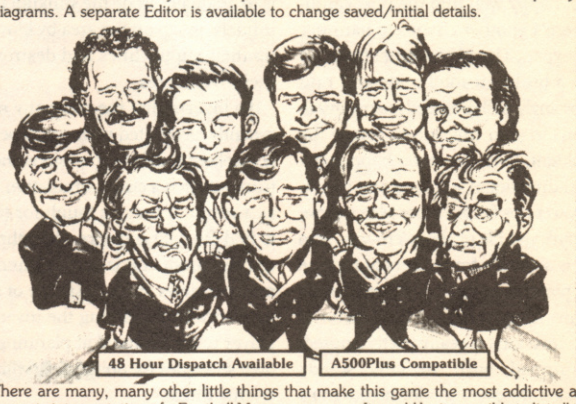

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final nail in the coffin is the fact that the whole thing is incredibly easy - a competent player will probably get half-way through the game on his first set of credits. Mega Twins had A-grade potential, but whether it's the fault of the original coin-op or the conversion it's actually turned out to be Meagre rather than Mega.

☆☆☆

MERCS

Price **Megadrive £39.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Sega**

As if Megadrive owners hadn't had quite enough shoot-it-out blasts to keep them happy well into the next century, here's another chance to hammer the joypad. The player must team up with a bullet-headed mate and raid increasingly well defended enemy installations in your mission to rescue the President. Even the smooth top-down multi-directional scrolling and plentiful power-ups fail to elevate Mercs above the rank and file of shoot-'em-ups. Solo play is available for soldiers of fortune who prefer to go-it-alone (or who haven't got any friends) but the thrill factor of such missions is really pretty limited.

Equipped with initially weedy weapons, the over-muscled heroes must gradually work their way up the screen, picking off rebel soldiers both on foot or lurking in gun towers or jeeps. Extra firepower and strength replenishers can be had by destroying the numerous crates lying about.

Players can speed their progress through the frequently tiresome levels by jumping into a semi-burned out jeep and roaring up the screen. This bit is quite amusing, as you can run down the enemy soldiers or blast them with the jeep's in-built bazooka.

As well as the requisite end-of-level guardians (which here take the form of an assortment of military hardware - planes, helicopters, tanks, etc) the levels are reasonably well broken up with bigger foes in the shape of guntowers, machine gun nests and the like.

Aside from the problems thrown up when a game controlled by the joypad necessitates diagonal firing (the enemy troops always seem to attack on a diagonal) Mercs has a brace of other inadequacies up its sleeve. It looks poor, offers absolutely no originality and when played solo is a crushing bore.

☆☆

MiG29M SUPER FULCRUM

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Domark**

Improving on an already successful formula, Domark have done away with many of the longevity problems of their first MiG game and have set this game against an epic backdrop of conflict in southern America. Taking the role of the pilot of a United Nations controlled MiG, the player must launch himself into hostile airspace from a solitary allied-controlled airbase - his mission is to gradually erode the stinking rebel infidels' grasp on the area by blowing up their supply lines and destroying their fuel depots.

It's bizarre that the company most recently associated with not especially excellent coin-op conversions should turn out such a classy simulation, and as a result, it may be tough for them to find the right audience. Nevertheless, a classy product it is, with a bunch of external views and a flexibility of mission structure enabling the inventive player to try his hand at planning his own strategies for doing away with the enemy threat.

Also included in this game is an implementation of the real MiG's fly-by-wire system, an auto-stabilising device which prevents the plane from flicking around all over the place like a big girl's blouse. Most handy in combat.

Presented, surprisingly enough, in polygon graphics, MiG beats the competition on the ease-of-use front, even if it is a bit tricky to imagine it outlasting some of the more intense Microprose products. A winner.

☆☆☆☆

MIGHT AND MAGIC III: ISLES OF TERRA

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **New World Computing/US Gold**

"By my mighty sword of Zorak, I, Hagor Dragonbone, must smite the evil doom-legions of Krynn before the alignment of the six moon-worlds!" Yes, well, you get the general idea. Might And Magic III is yet another delve into the much-explored realms of FRP gaming, this time coming over as a cross between *Dungeon Master* and *The Bard's Tale*. Is it just me or has the whole FRP genre been done to death so badly that there's just nothing new anymore?

This third Might And Magic outing would seem to support that argument, as apart from some very flashy VGA visuals and soundboard sonics, there seems to be very little new or interesting on offer, except maybe for that ever-persistent fraternity of die-hard RPG fanatics. As you'd suspect, the scenario is about as hackneyed as one is ever going to get, with some claptrap about returning the Ultimate Power Orbs (mmm, yes!) to the King. What that involves is selecting a party of dwarves, orcs, heroes, warriors and all that, and then wandering about fighting with dragons, collecting treasure and picking up clues.

The game itself actually is very pretty, but for the most part the adventuring is pretty slow and insubstantial. Considering, however, how conditioned FRP gamers have become, I doubt that anybody who's likely to buy it will be disappointed by what they find.

☆☆☆

MONSTER BUSINESS

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Eclipse**

The mad meanies from the big forest have once again broken loose, and are searching for little items they can steal completely spoiling Mr Bob's construction site. Become Leroy, the best beast buster around and blow all these nasty little monsters sky high! A goal in life if ever there was one. Monster business, the epitome of the average arcade game features stupid graphics and a doubly stupid premise - to retrieve all the objects from the building site, Leroy must blow up all the monsters with some sort of fatal bicycle pump, causing them to inflate and eventually rise to the top of the screen, dropping all their objects as they go.

Despite the idiocy of the whole affair, Monster Business is actually quite good. Different screens each present a different sort of hazard, whether it be sliding platforms or a speedy time limit, and the player is so interested in trying to get the the end of the level that he probably won't realise quite how crass and daft the game is.

Smart graphics and it-could-only-be-German music help Monster Business rise about the pack and shine out as an example of what arcade games should be about. It's like an Abba record, if you know what I mean.

☆☆☆☆

MOONSTONE

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Mindscape**

What a conundrum this is. While experience suggests that games billed as being at all "zany" should be treated with approximately the same amount of caution as a drunken pit-bull with rabies, Moonstone isn't actually that bad.

The aim of the game is to travel across a mystic land, searching for the Holy Grail-like Moonstone and trying to ensure that no other swine gets his mitts on it first. Up to four players can enter the quest, each selecting a coloured Knight to control. And why, prey tell, are we controlling Knights instead of elves or goblins or something? Because Moonstone is all about fighting, that's why!

At frequent intervals, the frankly tedious travelling sections are punctuated with action scenes. While walking in a wood or dithering by a stone circle, the Knight will be accosted by a hostile creature. Here is where the novelty value of Moonstone lies. The combat is *incredibly* violent and gory. Although the gore can be switched off by squamish gamers.

All in all a mixed bag. It could have been a really great combat game, but there's too much wandering around to give it much instant appeal. Worth a look.

☆☆☆

NEBULUS 2

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **21st Century Entertainment**

Rising from the Hewson ashes like a phoenix looking exceptionally like what-

ever it was before it was burnt, 21st Century Entertainment aren't having much luck at the moment. Not only are they having some considerable difficulty with their Megadrive product, but the one game that looked like it could actually make them some money has turned out to be somewhat of a disappointment.

The European coders responsible for sequelling John Phillips' original classic have done a bit of a botch job, ruining the gameplay that made the first game so excellent by piling on lots of inane and useless power-up type features. The classic formula has been totally swamped by the sheer weight of these new 'ideas', and as such anybody who enjoyed the first game is likely to be very disappointed by this. However, it is quite pretty and, at least for those who haven't seen the first game, not a total washout on the playability front. But while the first game knew exactly where the addiction/frustration threshold was, Nebulus 2 steps over it like it wasn't even there. Not recommended.

☆☆

NEVER-ENDING STORY 2

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Linel**

I've nothing against licences being close to their film origins - in fact, I positively endorse it - but when this is taken to such lengths that the game turns out as poor as the movie did then I have to draw the line.

Witness The Never-Ending Story 2. The film came and went at the cinemas with hardly a murmur of public interest, and unfortunately it's likely that the game of the film will suffer the same fate. The fact that the game's release trails that of the film by a good year or so is the final nail in its coffin.

It's a five-level arcade action romp. The first is a *Shadow of the Beast* style horizontal scroller, the second is a 3D chase, the third is a dull climb up the side of a tower, the fourth is a *Nebulus*-style platform affair, the fifth a *Wrath of the Demon*-style horse ride. As you can tell, it's positively sparking with originality. As usually happens with these multi-event games the individual sections are pretty weak in terms of gameplay(though moderately pleasant to look at). They're also quite difficult, and since death is frequent the lengthy gap between lives is particularly frustrating. Although well-presented, Never-Ending Story 2 can only be recommended to die-hard fans of the film. That's right - all three of you.

☆☆

OUTRUN

Price **Game Gear £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Sega**

It may be an oldy but it certainly isn't a goldy - at least, not in its Gear incarnation it isn't. Out Run is arcade racing action stripped down to its basics - the player has to drive a red Ferrarri through four stages, avoiding other traffic and those pesky stationary roadside obstacles. It's all against the clock, with the player being awarded precious extra seconds every time he completes one of the stages. And... er... that's just about it.

The impression of speed (achieved using good ol' colour banding) is fine, although the objects grow in an annoyingly coarse and chunky fashion. Unfortunately the number of roadsign objects is small, and the number of cars on the road even smaller - even on the hardest stage I only counted two other vehicles on the road at tops. Very poor. Worst of all it's ridiculously easy - I completed the game on my third go. Yes, really! The only real mark in the game's favour is the ability to play head-to-head with another Gear owner, but even then the thrills are few and far between. Not good.

☆☆

OUTRUN EUROPA

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **US Gold**

At long last! A game that has become a legend, along with the likes of *Star Trek* and *Birds of Prey*, over the last couple of years, simply because it's taken so bloody long to come out. The original idea was to release the product to cash in on the wave of euphoria from the original *OutRun* conversion - which should give you an idea of how long we've been waiting for it. We ended up getting the offiical sequel, *Turbo OutRun* first, which wasn't much cop, and now we've got this, which isn't either.

The basic idea is that the player has to take charge of a variety of vehicles - car, bike and boat - as he races over various land-and-sea stages to deliver a vital package, while international agents are out to stop you. It's all a bit ludicrous really, and what's seemingly supposed to be a cross between *OutRun* and *Chase H.Q.* with extra knobs on is in fact a bit of a shoddy mess. The road sections aren't much fun to play because control of the vehicles is so bloody over-sensitive, and the enemy cars just keep on getting in the way in a way that isn't conducive to gameplay at all, but is just very frustrating. The boat bits don't even bear think about because they're so unjust and difficult, and 99% of players will probably put their foot through the monitor screen within five minutes of loading it up. Talking of loading, the constant disk accessing is a pain in the prostate, and it all hardly seems worth it when it's not even very clear what's actually going on in the game. There are far better race games available, so don't waste your precious time pondering over this one.

☆

PACMAN

Price **Game Gear £19.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Namco**

Well, what is there to say about the original arcade classic that hasn't already been said? Not much, except that it's now available on the Sega handheld and isn't bad at all.

There are no frills, enhancements or other features that would have been a mistake to add here. This is not Pacman 91 or anything rubbish like that, but the good old original, as it was all those years ago. The conversion is pretty much spot-on (which, given that the game hardly pushes computer technology to its limit is only to be expected), right down to the original colours and sound effects.

One change that has had to be made is purely a practical one - to preserve the original size of the graphics, the Pac-maze is now a four-way scrolling affair, with only a section visible on screen at a time. It works well enough, but it can be a bit of a pain at times, as it makes it difficult for the player to see where the remaining dots are, and where ghosts might be coming in from. Pacman veterans may find this annoying, but to us more casual players it's not too much of a bind. So don't be a silly boy - get this classic up and running on your GameGear today!

☆☆☆☆

PEGASUS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Gremlin Graphics**

Oh deary deary dear. What a shame that just when Gremlin starts getting a good reputation for itself with its classy product of late, it turns out a piece of tripe like this. Based very loosely on the classic Greek myth, Pegasus is a weird half-and-half mix of *R-Type* style shoot-'em-up action and run-along-and-chop-up-the-baddies platform stuff. This mixture of airborne and ground-based action is supposed to give the player variety and keep him interest. In practice all it does it get very boring very quickly.

In the shoot-'em-up section, Perseus (or Percius, as the box incorrectly spells his name) flies along on the back of the mythical winged horse, which is animated in an atrociously unconvincing manner, and blasts away at the attacking gargoyles, demons, harpies, etc. When he's survived this onslaught, Pegasus lands, Perseus dismounts and the ground section begins. This happens 50 times (25 air sections, 25 on the ground), by which time the player has probably torn all his hair out, kicked in the TV screen and lobbed his computer out of the window.

It's not that Pegasus is a bad idea - it's just that it's been executed in a such a God-awful lazy and unimaginative manner. The action in the horsey bits is sluggish and annoying, while the ground levels lack any of the finesse of, say, *Switchblade II*. The fact that there's lots of it doesn't make it any more of a viable purchase - unless you're a masochist of course. Complete with all manner of intolerable spelling mistakes within the game ("existance" instead of "existence", "new" instead of "knew"), Pegasus would have only just made the grade two years ago, or on public domain today. To ask £26 quid for it when it falls so horribly below today's standards of graphics and game-

play is a bit on an insult. Avoid.
☆☆

PITFIGHTER

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Domark**

If ever there's a prime example example of an excellent conversion of an average coin-op then Pitfighter is it. If you're an arcade goer then you're probably more than familiar with the game. With its giant monitor screen, three sets of player controls and stand-out digitised graphics you could hardly miss it. Trouble was, underneath the unique flashy visuals and meaty sound lurked a distinctly dull beat-'em-up, made even worse by the confusion caused by the grainy-looking graphics. Where's my bloke gone? Is he hitting me or not? You know the sort of thing. All in all, a less than rewarding experience.

In converting Pitfighter for the home systems, Teque London have actually improved it a Hell of a lot. Indeed, if you liked the coin-op, chances are you'll like the home game even more. The graphics, which have retained pretty much all of the flash special FX of the coin-op, are clearer, and the slower pace makes the game much easier to play. The joystick controls are a little uninstinctive, but it only takes a few goes to get the swing of things. But as good a conversion as it is, it still can't compensate for the fact that fundamentally Pitfighter's about as exciting as tapping a fire button all day. Which, er, in Pitfighter is pretty much what you spend all your time doing.
☆☆☆

POPULOUS II

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Awesome! One of the greatest games of all time just got considerably better. Bullfrog's long-awaited sequel is just so excellent that it's difficult to find the words to describe it. Basically, it's prety much the same game - guide your followers through a series of apocalyptic battles, God versus God, over countless isometric worlds.

From that point on, however, it's a whole new ball game. Whereas the original game had only a hadful of godly effects, Populous II has scores of them, many much more deadly than anything encountered in the firs t game. The plethora of extra features (road and city building, effects that interact with each other, experience points that build up as you progress) make Populous II a far more involved and rewarding experience than the original. Absolutely phenomenal stuff, Populous II is a game that you really REALLY cannot afford to miss. Buy it immediately.
☆☆☆☆☆

PUT 'N' PUTTER

Price **Game Gear £29.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Import**

There's nothing like a good crazy golf game for a bit of handheld entertainment. And, as they say, this is nothing like a good crazy golf game.

Well, okay, so that's not strictly the case, but Put n' Putter is seriously flawed.

The major, indeed the only, real problem with the game is that it is simply far too easy. And by easy I mean the player (unless he's an utter imbecile) won't even get a whiff of a *Continue (Y/N)* screen until he has completed about twenty holes and has graduated onto the Expert level. While it's nice to get a little way into a game before grinding to a halt, this is ridiculous!

Aside from this, Put n' Putter does all the things a crazy golf game should, falling down in only a couple of minor places. The cursor moves rather sluggishly, and the courses could hardly be described as innovative. Worth a look if you're a really crap golfer.
☆☆

RAILROAD TYCOON

Price **Amiga £35.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **MicroProse**

The ACE Benchmark game makes it's way onto the Amiga, and what a fine conversion it is! Building a railroad

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empire across the USA at the turn of the 20th Century may sound like hard work, but for those who like their strategy to run deep, Sid Meier's simulation of that very pursuit is fun Fun FUN! We know its difficult to imagine how, but trust us, it is. The feeling of power is paramount as you lay your track from sea to shining sea, conduct big-time business and generally earn loads of cash.

Beginning life as an entrepreneur in the early 1800s, you must turn a small stake into the biggest stake in railroad industry history ever! By taking control of every element in the decision making process which makes the railroad work, the player must handle tiny details as well as broader political and economic issues, all at the same time as competing either with a friend or against rival tycoons from history. And every element of the game is represented with top-quality graphics to make even the most number-crunchingly intense sections of the title easy to manage. Meier's excellent user interface and the sheer precision of the game design and balance compared with the top-notch power of the Amiga make this version of the game an outright winner. Highly recommended to all and sundry.

☆☆☆☆☆

REALMS

Price **Amiga/Atari ST £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Good grief! Just what, as *Amiga Power* so aptly put it, has Peter '*Populous*' Molyneux started. Yes, it's him and his merry band of programmers at Bullfrog who we have we have to blame for the proliferation of isometric-3D view strategy games.

It's timing that's the biggestproblem with Realms, the latest offering from Graftgold, previously best known for arcade games like *Paradroid 90* and *Rainbow Islands*. If it had appeared about four months ago, it might be recieved more favourably. But in the last few months we've had *Mega-lo-Mania*, *Utopia* and the sequel to the game that strated it all *Populous 2* (which rightly blew the competition away).One can't help feeling the software-buying public have probably had enough of these sorts of games by now, and if I had the choice between *Populous 2* and *Realms*, I know which one I'd go for.

The pity is that Realms is actually quite a good game. The player is a warlord in a pseudo-fantasy world, vying for power with a number of other equally power-mad warriors. The player tax his people, raise armies, lay siege to cities, the usual sort of thing. Imagine *Powermonger* with more depth but less impressive graphics and you get the rough idea. It plays well, control over the various components of your empire is well thought out, and the mix of strategy and action is balanced nicely. Trouble is, when you've been a God raining fire and brimstone on your people Realms comes across as Earthbound in every sense.

☆☆☆☆

RISE OF THE DRAGON

Price **Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Dynamix/Sierra On-Line**

Amiga owners have been scrambling to become the first to purchase this-the first or a new wave of Sierra games helmed by the perennially popular Dynamix team. But they should be warned. While Amiga owners get to enjoy just as many visual thrills and plot twists as their PC Pals, they pay the price of swapping ten (count every last one as it slips in and out of your drive for the umpteenth time) disks.

However, if you're willing to pay the access-time price, Rise is an extremely rewarding product. The player takes the role of a futuristic detective, a real Marlowe type, slugging his way through a drug addled city of sleaze, the last remaining obstacle between the mysterious Dragon and total control of the entire planet! Played in first-person perspective, the game uses the no-typing-necessary control interface which Sierra have made their trademark.

This is another example of the interactive movie deal which American companies are so fond of forcing down our throats, but for once it isn't too bad. There is actually a story here! And there is actually some adventuring to do. The player must investigate the strange drug-related death of the Mayor's daughter, interrogate scummy criminals and do all the other stuff that private investigators have to do. Wire taps, opening other people's mail, hanging out in low-rent strip joints. What a life.

And it's all in those lovely hand drawn graphics. Mind you... all those disks...

☆☆☆☆

ROBIN HOOD

Price **IBM PC £30.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Millennium**

Mercilessly coat-tailing the publicity of the recent batch of Lincoln green movies, Millennium's completely unlicensed version of the tale is surprisingly entertaining.

Presented in *Populous* style, the game sticks to the classic storyline of Robin of Locksley being booted out of his lands by the evil Sherrif of Nottingham, deserted by his people and left to fend for himself.

The player, taking the title role of course, must assemble a band of merry men and set about doing away with the nasty old sheriff once and for all. An equally important goal for the player is to convince all the peasants and other inhabitants of the forest and its environs that Rob isn't the murdering thieving blaggard that the Sherrif has described to them but is a lovely kind hearted soul.

Aside from combat and object-seeking, there's a refreshing amount of genuinely funny dialogue in the game too, with the characters camping up their roles to the best of their ability.

It's an extremely enjoyable and innovative arcade adventure cum strategy cum role playing game who's worst failing could be that the plot is so familiar the player is compelled to play through to the very end as soon as he physically can, thus diminishing the appeal of return visits.

☆☆☆☆

ROBOCOD

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Millennium**

And about time too. Computer owners have been waiting a long time for a platform game good enough to wave in the faces of the smug console owners, revoltingly proud of their *Sonics* and their *Marios*. And here it is.

Robocod wins few awards for its originality. There are elements of just about every running n' jumping game from *Manic Miner* onwards in there somewhere, but thanks to careful design and wise mixing and matching of game styles the end result is far more than the sum of its parts.

As in *Mario IV*, the core game task is simple - get from one end of the level to the other, and jump on the heads of any bad guys to wander past. Of course, in practice there's a bit more to it than that. Some of the 70+ levels see Robocod travelling through the levels in a bouncing car, a spluttering prop plane and even an old enamelled bath! There are even some areas where 'Cod swims around - much like he did in the game's prequel *James Pond*.

In fact, it's the sheer variety of the game - along with the superbly smooth control over the fishy main character - that makes it such a joy to play. Every level features something new, either in graphics or gameplay, and there's little chance of boredom setting in. The wonderfully cute sprites, bright and cheerful backdrops and sing-alongable tunes are excellent too. All in all, Robocod is a polished, playable and - thank God - *fun* slice of platform pie that you'd have to be criminally insane to let slip by.

☆☆☆☆☆

ROBOCOP 3

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Ocean**

Robocop? In 3D? Nah, it'd never work - would it? Well, the good news is that it does! Indeed, Digital Image Design's unique slant on the *Robocop 3* movie licence arguably make it the best tie-in yet.

In essence, Robocop 3 isn't *that* different from almost every other film tie-in. It's an amalgam of several game sequences - a bit of shoot-'em-up, a bit of driving, a bit of beat-'em-up - where the simplistic gameplay is compensated for by the sheer variety on offer. However, in this case there's another factor - DID's ground-breaking solid 3D.

Rather than watching some sprites leaping about a 2D backdrop, the player views the world through Robo's eyes as he patrols the streets of Old Detroit on foot, in a police car and even in the air thanks to his new Gyropack. The atmosphere generated, especially in the foot patrol sequences, is quite unbe-

lievable. The only weak links in an otherwise incredibly-strong chain are a couple of feeble hand-to-hand combat sequences with a robotic Ninja assassion - the combat moves are limited and the action sluggish.

However, those sequences apart, there are frequent occasions during the game that the player actually does feel as if he is taking part in a film. And at the end of the day, isn't that what you should be buying a film tie-in for?

☆☆☆☆

ROBOZONE

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Image Works**

Trying to hop onto the Green bandwagon (and missing by about six months), Imagework's latest and certainly not greatest puts the player in the driving seat of a giant two-legged war machine, a sort of cut-price version of the one in Psygnosis' *Killing Game Show*, with a mission to put an end to pollution. Hoorah!.

Fundamentally Robozone's a simple blast-anything-that-moves affair, with the programmers trying to maintain player interest by constantly changing the play style. One level's a side-viewed multidirectional-scrolling explore-n'-shoot, the second's much the same but in 3D and the third's a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up. While each is programmed well enough, there's precious little fun or excitement to be found in any of them.

The really annoying thing about Robozone is it's pretense to being 'Green' - the manual is littered with Top Tips about how to help save the environment. One states pompously: "If you have a choice, avoid buying packaged goods." Considering that Robozone comes in a giant box with a single disc and a thin manual rattling about inside, the irony of this statement beggars belief. Probably the best tip is the first one: "Try not to waste energy." Imageworks, having played this I already have.

☆☆

ROBOCOP 2

Price **Game Boy £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Import**

Hmm. A bit of an oddity this one. While the graphics are bigger and chunkier than before and the storyline follows the second movie as opposed to the first, you can't help but feel that you really have seen this all before.

The main problem lies with the best that Robocop 2 won't scroll backwards. This makes the supposed exploration of the various factories and warehouses in the game a bit farcical, since Robo can only explore the location which he comes to next.

Learning the pattern of hostages to be rescued, nuke to be destroyed and criminals to book will help, but it hardly solves the problem.

Still, it looks great and the sound effect and music are excellent. And let's face it, if you're going to get yourself a shoot-em'-up as a New Year treat, it's best to stick with the name you know.

☆☆☆

RODLAND

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Storm**

Stomach-emptyingly cute it may be, but there's no denying that Rodland is a fine game. The Jaleco coin-op wasn't particularly noteworthy, finding itself adrift in a sea of graphically excellent games upon its release. Now, however, the conversion seems to have cropped up when the highest-profile cute game over the moment (*Magic Pockets*) has failed to meet expectations.

The player must work his way through a massive suite of screens, collecting points n' power ups and killing monsters with his rod (hence the name) by bashing them into the floor.

The end of each level is marked by the arrival of an enormous end of level bad guy such as an elephant, who, despite looking about as threatening as a big lump of cotton wool in a knitted bag will do for the players forthwith. Interestingly enough, the player can opt to play a girl if he/she wants, not that it makes much difference to the playing style. And to be honest, the 'boy' looks so bleeding effeminate you'd never know anyway.

Chock-a-block full of excellent visuals, Rodland is a fine conversion and it could even be argued to better its coin-op parent, as control over the characters has been improved. Certainly not a title for gamers into depth or gung-ho blasting, but a nonetheless worthwhile purchase for anyone else.

☆☆☆☆

RUGBY - THE WORLD CUP

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Sports Arcade**
Publisher **Domark**

Hey! It's *Scrum Off*! Well, not quite, but it is a pretty blatant attempt by the Doms to adapt Anco's footy classic style to the rough n' tumble, if you will, 'world' of rugby. Of course, as any fule kno, rugby and football are very different sports, with the former lacking the non-stop speed of the latter. Not, then, perhaps the best game to try to shrink to fit into *Kick Off*'s hard and fast playing style.

However, as it 'appens, it all works pretty well. Sure, the action is a bit stop and start, but there is a definite flow to the game and few lapses in pace. The game is viewed in plan view, with the pitch scrolling to follow the player's... er... player (who is, natch, the one nearest the ball). Throws and kicks are controlled simply by the joystick, and it lacks the subtlety of *Kick Off* (no aftertouch here). Scrums are a case of frantically waggling the joystick to force the opposition back, and this is fine - unless you're playing the All Blacks, in which case you need to waggle a sub-light speeds to beat them.

In fact, that's probably the biggest criticism - the top teams are too tough. There are other minor niggles, such as the way player sprites overlap on top of each other and the way that the other members of the team don't put themselves in good positions to pass, meaning that play often revolves one-man rushes from mid-way down the pitch to the try line. But while Rugby may not be perfect, it's still a pretty good 'try'. (Cue sound of reviewer being shot.)

☆☆☆☆

SARAKON

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £19.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Games which call the player stupid are unlikely to go down in history as great entertainers, yet Sarakon, despite making this fatal mistake is a perfectly decent rip-off of the *Mah Jong* tile-swapping business. Basically, if you imagine *Snap* played with some old oriental tablets and with some complicated 'can't do that' rules, then you're pretty close to imagining what Sarakon is all about.

The aim of the game is to click on similar tablets which sit in a particular orientation, eventually ending up with no tablets left, or at least as few as possible before the time limit runs out. Once done, the player is rewarded with a breakdown of his score and a comment from the computer as to his Sarakon ability.

The problem with these puzzle games, however, is that they all look similar enough to make the player want to pick them up and have a go, yet they insist on containing enough rule subtleties to make doing just that impossible. The result? The *Mah Jong* player will feel infuriated that he can't make his normal moves work.

The presentation is first class, apart from the cheesy sound effects and music which don't so much create the ambiance of the Far East as a grubby take-away in Dulwich.

If comparatively sedate mouse-clicking is your bag, and your eyes can stand staring at the monitor for ages while you scratch your head, Sarakon is the game for you.

☆☆☆

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE

Price **IBM PC £40.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Lucasfilms/US Gold**

Deep, deep, deep. Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe is a big old game and no mistake. It's also the sequel the critically acclaimed *Their Finest Hour*. The title comes packed with new goodies but brings the same problem of the first game; i.e. the flicky and rather horrible bitmap graphics.

The player is offered the chance to pilot aircraft in a seemingly limitless number of historical missions, shadowing or guarding planes and taking place in actual battles and scenarios of

the Second World War.

However, played in a *Wing Commander* style with bitmaps taking the place of the polygons so frequently and successfully used in other flight sims, Luftwaffe will have all but the owners of the fastest machines hammering down the detail level in the attempt to get it to run at an acceptable rate. Ambitious players can then define their own missions to determine what history would have turned out like if there was just one less Messerschmitt BF109G in a particular combat situation. Luftwaffe is exactly the sort of game - as distinct from *Wing Commander* - that you actually want to make excuses for. And that's simply down to the fact that under the try-too-hard graphics which actually look pretty absurd every now and again, there is a quite brilliant game.

☆☆☆☆☆

SEVEN COLORS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Infogrames**

Tetris, the game that started it all, may be getting on a bit now, but there's always room for a new puzzle game on the market. The only problem is that the vast majority of puzzlers that have been washing up on these shores from America and Europe have either been of unbearably low quality, or just too weird to get the head round.

Seven Colors from Infogrames, a company that prides itself on its off-the-wallness, fits snugly into the latter category. It's played over a large board made up of hundreds of tiny coloured diamonds where the objective is to change as many diamonds to your colour, spreading them like a virus across the screen, faster than your opponent does. The first player to fill 50% of the screen area is the winner. It's difficult enough to understand when you're actually playing the game, so don't worry if you're a little foggy after that brief explanation.

In fact the major problem with the game is that it's not very easy to understand, and because things just seem to happen it's not very easy to keep track, or indeed to work out what's going on at all. The confusing situation is further compounded because the instructions hardly explain anything at all. Persistent players may well get something out of it however, and there's a variety of game options to spice up the action if they do. Oh, and there's some very nice in-game classical music which suits the nature of the game perfectly and is very soothing indeed.

☆☆

SHUTTLE

Price **IBM PC £49.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Not for the faint hearted, this one. As you've probably guessed, it's a simulation of the Space Shuttle. And the word 'rigourous' just doesn't even begin to do justice to the level of accuracy that developers Vektor Grafix have achieved. The cockpit is bewildering - all the player can see is bank upon bank of knobs, dials and levers, most of which work and have some effect.

The player not only has to fly the damn thing, he has to open up the bay doors and control the robot arms to deploy satellites and so forth. And this technical accuracy is backed up by some of the best 3D graphics ever seen. There's even a realistically and accurately mapped planet Earth that rotates and the star constellations are all plotted correctly as well.

As stunning an achivement as Shuttle is, the biggest problem with it is its limited appeal. Personally I think it's brilliant and completely absorbing, but I can understand that there might be some people who find the idea of twiddling all those dials more than a little off-putting. If that's because of the sheer daunting complexity of the whole thing then that shouldn't be a problem, because there's a whole range of player aids that make the game accessible to everybody, no matter what their sim proficiency. But there's no getting away from the fact that if your patience with sims ends at *Thunderhawk*, then you're likely to find little to interest you here.

☆☆☆☆

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Price **Amiga £35.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Microprose**

It may have taken five years, but the sequel to one of the most critically acclaimed and publicly admired sim games is finally with us. Silent Service II features all the best bits from the first game as well as a host of original and new doo-dads.

Digitised graphics and sampled sounds simply confirm the Service as a game which is undoubtedly one of the most detailed, accurate and realistic on the market, but new gamers should be warned that, just like life on a real submarine, it's not all walking, er, action.

No. There's a lot of the old *Above Us The Waves* stuff with turning off engines to sneak up on enemy warships without alerting their radar. And as for all that tank blowing stuff. I ask you!

Microprose are indubitably the outright kings of all things sim., but their policy of increasing the action and minimising the dial-watching as used to such good effect in *F-15 Strike Eagle II* would be well extended to this particular title.

For gamers wishing to purchase an accurate sub simulation, rest assured, there is absolutely none better. But those expecting to get their torpedoes off straight away would be better to wait for a more accessible equivalent.

☆☆☆☆☆

SLIDERS

Price **Game Gear £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Import**

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! What are Loriciel trying to force upon us now! In the wake of the global mania for puzzle games, it seems that any old rubbish will do these days. Here we have Slider, a fat yellow thing who must trundle around a selection of mazes doing his utmost not to bump into the bad guys. Once Slider has travelled over, and therefore coloured in, each square in the maze, he moves onto the next.

Later mazes are made more hazardous by sliding platforms which will propel Slider into deadly situations.

A time limit prevents the player from being able to dawdle, or maybe consider his next move, and there are lots of squares which simply kill off Slider on contact. Terrific.

Far from being the sort of game to while away many a train journey, Slider is a pain in the arse of the first order, and deserves a place in absolutely no-one's software collection..

☆

SOLITAIRE POKER

Price **Game Gear £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Sega**

Everyone loves a good puzzle game, and this is a very good one. The aim is simple - select a card from one of the four piles on offer, and place it on a 5 x 5 grid. Points are awarded for pairs, flushes, etc, created either vertically, horizontally or along the main diagonals. Score over a certain amount and the player progesses on to the next, tougher level. There are a number of variants on the theme, but that's the main thrust of the game.

What more is there to say about such a simple concept? Aesthetically it's fine - the functional graphics are clear and colourful and there's a vast number of background tunettes to pick between. Although not exactly using the full-colour LCD capabilities of the Gear to it's fullest, it's one of the most enjoyable Gear games I've seen for a long, long time, and as such comes with a strong recommendation.

☆☆☆☆☆

SMASH TV

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Ocean**

"Good luck - you're gonna need it" screams the show's oily compere, and never have there been truer words said. This conversion of the incredibly violent Williams coin-op has translated surprisingly well to the home systems, with nearly all the blood and thunder elements so beloved of the original ported across faithfully.

The game takes the form of a futuristic game show, where one or two contestants armed with a rapid-fire gun slug it out with a seemingly endless parade of thugs, freaks and goons to win big money and prizes in a single-screen arena. Power-ups and end-of-zone bad guys add to the already phenomenal carnage.

On a purely visceral level, it's immensely satisfying as the plugged opponents explode into red gobbets of flesh. Indeed, the sprites are small enough to be almost anybody you want them to be, so you can imagine that you're shooting up endless clones of your boss if you want to. Very therapeutic.

As a single-player game it's fine, though there's a serious risk that boredom may well set in worryingly early. The two-player game, on the other hand, is something else. There's not been player-to-player shouting like this since *Kick Off 2*.

The coin-op's two joysticks (one to move, one to direct fire) have translated adequately to a single controller, though if you have two there is an option to use both which makes the game far better.

A superb conversion, and more than deserving of your hard-earned pennies. Go to it, you psycho you!

☆☆☆☆

STEVE MCQUEEN - WESTPHASER

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Loriciels**

You what?! Talk about a cynical licence! Not only is the poor chap dead and unable to defend himself against this sort of thing, but this game actually bears no relevance to the great man at all! Okay, so he was in a few cowboy films, and this is a cowboy game, but there the similarity ends. Don't expect to see any of Steve in the game - his involvement begins and ends with a tacky black and white picture on the box.

It gets weirder still. Because it has the word Westphaser in the title, you'd assume it's compatible with the Westphaser light gun. But oh, no. It's conventional mouse, keyboard or joystick control only. Just what on Earth is going on here?

Alright, so it's all very dodgy so far, but what of the game itself? Well, unfortunately things don't get much better here either, as what's on offer is a bog-standard Operation Wolf-style shootout set in a variety of typically Wild West scenarios. That might sound like at least a bit of a laugh, but the action is so stunted and dull that it's difficult to get even vaguely excited. To be fair, the graphics are quite nice in a funny French sort of way and there are some jolly touches (you can shoot the dresses off the women, for example), but it's hardly enough to justify financial outlay. Is that Steve himself I hear spinning in his grave?

☆☆

STRIKE FLEET

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Strike Fleet doesn't look the most inspiring game from the shots on the back of the box, but the Lucasfilm credit hints that this may be better than it appears. As, in fact, it is. The game is a sea-based strategy game split into fourteen individual missions or a more-taxing eight-mission campaign. After each mission briefing, the player is allocated a number of points (depending on the difficulty of the mission) to 'spend' in the shipyard. Each ship 'costs' a certain number of points depending on its class, so the player must be careful in picking a balanced fleet.

Once at sea, the player can flick between the ships at will. Control is relatively simplistic (thankfully), allowing the player to steer, change speed, activate radar and sonar and, of course, fire the variety of on-board weapons. In addition, certain ships carry a complement of helicopter that can be sent on recces or sub-hunting forays.

Despite it's initially drab appearance, Strike Fleet actually turns out to be quite involving. There's a great deal of satisfaction to be had from successfully controlling the fleet, and seeing off the air, sea or underwater attacks provides frequent doses of adrenalin. Admittedly, those without a strategic leaning are unlikely to be converted by the game's charms, but if Strike Fleet sounds at least slightly appealing give it a go. I think you'll be surprised.

☆☆☆☆

SUPAPLEX

Price **Amiga/ST/PC £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle Game**
Publisher **Digital Integration**

"You're Murphy, bug-hunter extraordinaire, exploring deep inside a crazy computer. Snik Snaks must be avoided at all coasts, and falling Zonks will trap the unwary." Well, with an intro like that, you can resist? Supaplex comes a quite a refreshing change from a company that normally turns up heavy-duty simulations and plane-based arcade games - it's half puzzle, half arcade, a sort of weird hybrid of Boulderdash and Pacman. In each of the game's 111 levels, Murphy must snap up all the "infotrons" by whizzing about the four-way scrolling screen, gobbling up bits of the landscape and grabbing them when you find them. The trick is to eat the landscape in such a way that you don't send all mannaer of horrible heavy things crashing down on yourself. As the levels progress things can more complex, with warp gates, explosive devices and marauding enemies.

Okay, okay, so it's Boulderdash with knobs on, but it isn't actually at all bad. It may not look like much, but it feels nice and smooth and the simplistic action is strangely compelling. With plenty of options and well-varied levels, Supaplex is likely to keep you playing for quite a while - provided its simple charms manage to grab you in the first place.

☆☆☆☆

SUSPICIOUS CARGO

Price **Amiga/Atari ST £25.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Gremlinn**

The pseudo follow-up to BSS Jane Seymour is a lot more enjoyable than its mediocre predecessor, primarily because it's a whole lot more accessible and has a pleasant sense of humour. We've classified it as an adventure here, but it's really a hotch-potch of many different game styles - there's a strong RPG element throughout and a sprinking of arcade-based sub-games along the way.

As maverick space pilot Jonah Hayes, the player's job is transport a highly dodgy shipment of genetic refuse across the galaxy in his rundown spaceship, the Lady Luck. Even something as simple as keeping the ship operational and on course is not as easy as it sounds, and things are naturally complicated along the way by a variety of unsavoury characters who want nothing more than to throw spanners in the works and prevent Jonah's cargo from reaching its destination.

I must admit to being a little perplexed by Suspicious Cargo - I mean, just what exactly is it? The way that it seems to flit between gameplay styles can be confusing, but despite this the storyline holds the disparate elements together well, and as such you end up with a surprisingly coherent and playble product. It's by no means anything groundbreaking, but it will be appreciated by anyone who fancies a good space yarn with a few laughs.

☆☆☆☆

TEENAGE MUTANT HERO TURTLES - THE COIN-OP

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Image Works**

Now, let's get one thing straight from the outset, Turtles is neither the most complicated or involving game in the world. However, Probe's conversion of what could best be described as a fairly basic coin-op beat-'em-up is admirably close to its coin-gobbling dad, complete with all the regular Turtles and their opponents.

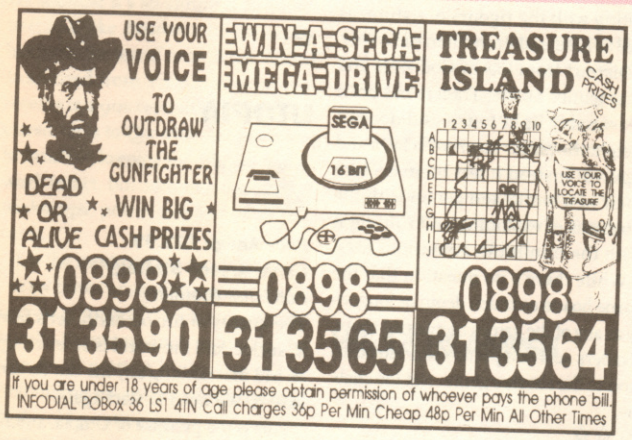
Catering for one or two players, the game leads the Turtles through a brace of increasingly dangerous screens, gradually leading up to a climax involving rescuing the glamorous April from a building. set alight by the evil Shredder.

Turtles suffers from two distinct problems. The first is that one feels Turtlemania is definitely on the wane, and there is no longer the public fever guaranteeing that anything green will sell by the bucketload. The second is that, despite Probe's pretty sound conversion, the game's quite easy, and even the coin-op itself wasn't that incredible.

☆☆☆☆

THUNDER BURNER

Price **Atari ST £24.99**



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Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Loriciels**

"Top arcade game with action, futiristic combats and super stress!!", we are promised. *Space Harrier* on the Spectrum is what we get.

Slogging his way through twelve stages of shocking 3D graphics, our intrepid hero must control his Transformer-like craft deep into the heart of enemy territory and destroy the evil aliens' Big Base.

Even painting a girl on the back of the box with her noughts out has failed to make Thunder Burner at all exciting.

Piloting the jet plane is actually more fun since everything moves at a faster pace, but the bi-ped robot has a better chance of destroying the pill-boxes containing, one presumes, dirty alien scum.

It's all a bit poor, and apart from some end-of-level monsters which are presentable enough, falls a long way short of even the most basic blast standards.

And if all that seems a little harsh, Loriciels can al least comfort themselves with the knowledge that they win the Most Gratuitous Tit Award. Hooray.

☆

THUNDERHAWK

Price **Amiga £30.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Core Design**

Most flight sims require a good deal of practice before any reward can be garnered from them. All those keyboard controls and miscellaneous aircraft functions do quite a lot to put off anyone looking for a quick blast. Core Design have seen this gap in the market and more than adequately filled it with Thunderhawk. All control is via the mouse, which makes everything, from weapon selection to helicopter control, quick and easy. It's a welcome change from the usual memory test of clicks and non-clicks.

The game itself is broken down into a series of campaigns, each preceded by a graphic briefing sequence indicating target and terrain type. Before taking to the sky the player must select the appropriate armament for the Thunderhawk, although there's a default if this seems to much of a chore.

What makes the game a treat is the handling of the helicopter. The controls make flying intuitive, letting the player get on with the mission rather than battling to stay airborne. Graphics are smooth and move at a fair click, though there isn't much background scenery. If you've never been tempted to try a flight sim, then this is the game to change your attitude.

☆☆☆☆☆

TIP OFF

Price Amiga/Atari ST £25.99
Genre Sports Game
Publisher Anco

The fact that Anco's latest sports game comes from the keyboard of Kick Off co-designer Steve Screech has certainly attracted a lot of interest during the game's development, but now the final product's here it has be said that it represents somewhat of a disappointment.

The idea is fine - apply the same techniques that made Kick Off great, jiggle them about a bit to fit Basketball's smaller play area and rules and away you go. And indeed many of Kick Off's trademarks are in evidence here - the game's simple, instinctive, and very fast indeed. But (and it's a big but) it just doesn't work.. Basketball is a fast game, but Tip Off's interpretation of it is a bit too speedy for comfort. As a result it just doesn't quite spark in the same way as Kick Off, andso basketball fans would still be best advised to go with Cinemaware's version.

***

TOE JAM & EARL

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Sega**

Jammin'! Or, in Earth speak, oh dear. Toe Jam & Earl were presumably intended, like Sonic before them, to become 'cult' game personalities and thus attract a whole new legion of fans to the Megadrive. I don't know if they has or not, but on the basis of the game they're in I can't for the life of me see how they would. If Sega think this is what 'Ver Kids' want, then they're sorely mistaken.

It's a simple maze game. One or two players, controlling the far-out aliens of the title, have to travel around a number of exotic islands searching for the ten missing pieces of their crashed spaceship. Some islands are populated by monsters of various description that have to be avoided.

Along the way the gruesome twosome may find bonuses which will award them anything from speed-up trainers to a blow from a bolt of lightning. Mixed blessings or what?

And... er... that's it. Yes, really. All the game consists of is wandering around, very slowly. Boring really doesn't quite sum up the toe-curling tedium of the whole debacle. The only points of special note are the way the screen splits when Toe Jam & Earl get too far apart, the appealing nature of the two aliens and the well-funky music. Any chance of putting the music on CD, Sega?

☆

TRADERS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Linel**

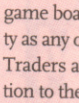
If you imagine a hotch-potch of Utopia, Mega lo Mania and Populous, except in 2D, you'd be pretty close to understanding what Traders is all about. Again, it's a race for technological development and fiscal success, with up to four players battling it out on a mysterious planet, evolving robots and competing with the rigours of nature, as well as hostile advances from each other.

Distinct from lots of God sims and strat games of late, Traders has got a reasonably light touch and doesn't weight the player down with facts and figures. Instead it lets them explore their new world and get on with the business of exploiting and ruining it with the minimum amount of fuss.

While there's no question that the game boasts as much depth or longevity as any of the games mentioned above, Traders acts as a pretty solid intruduction to the strategy genre. Not too shabby.

☆☆☆

UNDER PRESSURE



Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Electronic Zoo**

Oops. Funny how one minute you're on top of the world and the next you're, erm, not. A situation which top notch programmers Eldritch the Cat have found themselves in with their latest release, Under Pressure. Their last and indeed only release, *Projectyle* was exceedingly well received, being a pretty excellent sports sim, but Heaven only knows what gremlins and glitches are to blame for this disaster.

Styled in an uncomfortably similar fashion to Psygnosis games (the in-between level text is virtually identical to Psygy's game name text and the robot which the player controls looks exceedingly like the creature on the *Shadow of the Beast* box), Under Pressure falls down in almost every single respect.

Guiding a huge robotic killing machine through a bunch of decaying cityscapes, the player must duel with a myriad of different monsters - mainly snakes - with the impressive arsenal of weaponry available from his cockpit.

Sounds alright, doesn't it? Alas, from here on in, the game falls down rather badly. For a start, everything is far too big. The player's robot almost fills the screen, but doesn't have the detail or animation finesse to support its size. Also, the scale presents a problem in that since only one horizontal level of the city is ever visible on the screen, the game feels more like a duck shoot than an exciting adventure. Absolutely no aiming is necessary for shooting for the monsters either, as they just sit up and swallow the player's fire. Oh dear.

☆

UTOPIA

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Gremlin**

The quality of life on earth, let's face it, sucks. And the world is screwed up so bad that nothing anyone can do can save it. We need to start again.

This is the premise of Utopia, another *Populous/Powermonger* style affair. Except this time the aim, rather than simply ruling a world or conquering it is to construct and run it and to make all its inhabitants feel really good! The aim is to elevate the quality of life to 100% - Utopia.

It's not difficult to grasp the aims and controls of the game. And it quickly becomes apparent that there are lots of problems thrown up by the idea of making everyone happy. For a start, if you spend all the money on hospitals, food production and month-long sports festivals, your populace will be content, but without any credible defence

when the inevitable computer-controlled alien attack occurs.

Beginning from just a few key buildings, it's up to the player to construct the colony using icon-driven actions while inspecting the world in isometric 3D. There are almost no rules in this society. You can run things virtually any way you want.

The only factor that is missing is the option to try and run things as a dictatorship regime and make a certain part of the population very happy while keeping the workers ground down into the dirt. Still, that never works, does it?

☆☆☆☆☆

VOLFIED

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Empire**

Qix is back in town, and better than ever! No matter how widely tastes may differ among the gamesplaying fraternity, you'd be hard pushed to find anybody who doesn't enjoy a game of good old *Qix*. Its appeal is universal because it's so simple and addictive, and like *Breakout*, its gameplay has stood the test of time. What Volfied (converted from Taito's coin-op) represents is a 90s version of the original classic - it is to *Qix* what *Arkanoid* was to *Breakout*, keeping the original framework intact, but adding lots of pretty backdrops, power-ups and extra features.

For the most part it's much the same - draw boxes around the screen to fill up 75% or more of the screen area without the fusewire which makes up the line itself getting hit by any of the marauding enemies - which, instead of the old gyrating line, now takes the form of a giant mothership that roams about spitting about bullets, and a couple of pesky little helpers. Lasers and speedups are among the collectables, while high-tech backgrounds and SFX provide the aesthetic overhaul.

Since *Qix*-style games are so thin on the ground, Volfied, with its classy execution and uncluttered gameplay is a welcome addition to the software scene - and if you've got any sense and admiration for the classics, you'll add it your collection too.

☆☆☆☆

VROOM

Price **Atari ST £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Lankhor**

Without wanting to be nasty to our European counterparts, what with 1992 and all that, it has to be said that most of the software that crosses over from the continent is a bit smelly. Vroom, however, from French publisher Lankhor, has proven itself to be the exception to the rule. Although it's not a patch on the likes of *Indianapolis 500* or *Formula One Grand Prix*, Vroom is nevertheless a jelly supper racing game, boasting very impressive speed as the player vrooms his way (hence the name) around a first-person environment.

It's got all the usual fixtures and fittings - rear-view mirrors, pit-stops, overhead maps,bridges, dips and hills on the track, training modes, qualifying laps, choice of courses and some spectacular crash sequences. It's more ofa racing game than simulation, as controls and instrumentation has been kept to a minimum - there's nothing too much to worry about here apart from going very fast, avoiding the other cars and keeping on the road. And it works well enough, being very playable and actually quite compulsive, with the array of racing options adding to the game's longevity. The only dodgy factor is that the joystick option is restricted to the arcade mode - the more serious race options only allow mouse control. Very dodgy indeed. But apart from that, not at all bad.

☆☆☆☆

WILLY BEAMISH

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Dynamix/Sierra On-Line**

The Adventures of Willy Beamish, to give it its full name, is somewhat of a oddity. Dubbed an 'interactive cartoon', it's sort of a weird cross between *The Wonder Years* and *The Simpsons*. Willy is the typical all-American troublemaking pre-teen schoolkid, complete with grubby hands, pet frog and accordingly stereotypical family. Strange things are afoot in suburb of Frumpton, and Willy must investigate.

Willy is yet another of those games that sounds a whole lot better than it actually is. That's not to say that it's bad, but the gameplay is very trial-and-error, with luck often playing more of a part than skill or judgment. As such, more time is spent restoring saved games than actually playing, and it can get quite frustrating at times, especially when you have to sit through the comical set-piece for the umpteenth time. As an interactive cartoon, it's exclent, with suitably stereotypical characters, some funny jokes and gorgeous visuals. As a game it's compelling, but not in a way that encourages real addiction or involvement. You're unlikely to come back to again and again.

☆☆☆☆

WING COMMANDER II

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Origin**

No matter what else you might say about the Wing Commander games, they look darned good. The trouble is, there isn't really much else to say about them. Well, perhaps that's a little harsh but here in the sequel to the much talked-about and little-played original, it's very much a case of more of the same.

Interstellar war with the Kilrathi continues, and in the most recent Kilrathi victory, the Confederation flagship Tiger's Claw has been destroyed by invisible Kilrathi stealth fighters. As the sole survivor of the assault, the player must first convince his federation comrades that the attack did genuinely take place and then lead a federation force to track them down and destroy them.

Graphically excellent although particularly processor heavy, Wing Commander II certainly isn't a brilliant game. It's a worthy sequel to its predecessor but is the sort of title where that trite old phrase about trying before buying is 100% appropriate.

☆☆☆

WOLFCHILD

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Core Design**

Okay, okay, so it's just another platform game. What separates Wolfchild from the ever-growing crowd is the sheer excellence of its execution. Rick Dangerous creator Simon Phipps has surpassed himself once again, creating a game that has everything an arcade afficionado could ask for - incredibly fast-paced action, superb graphics, awesome pyrotechnical displays, a rollicking soundtrack and... ooh, lots more besides.

The plot tells of a brilliant genetic scientist kidnapped by a corrupt corporation to produce mutant killing machines for their own dastardly ends. The scientist's son, Saul Morrow, bungs himself into his dad's prototype gene-splitting machine and turns himself into Wolfchild, a half-man, half-beast character with special energy-spitting powers.

What follows is five levels of top-level platform cum beat'em-up action with Saul switching back and forth between his human and beastly forms to help him progress. When enough energy is collected, Saul becomes the wolfman character and is blessed with the power to fire orbs of electrical energy at the mutant hordes that continually attack him.

It might not be the most original game in the world, its supreme playability more than makes up for any lack of real innovation. It's hard, fast and dangerous to know. Give it pride of place in your platform collection now.

☆☆☆☆☆

WORLD CLASS RUGBY

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Sports Simulation**
Publisher **Audiogenic**

Audiogenic have opted for a rigorous approach to the sport, offering plenty of accuracy and a great deal of scope for subtle play. And as such, it's somewhat more satisfying to play, if a bit harder to get into.

It's also a lot prettier, with play viewed from a 3D angle and all the players animate nicely if a little stiffly. If this doesn't appeal, there's a selection of other views on offer, including a no-nonsense top-down view for the more traditionally minded. World Class Rugby may not have Domark *Rugby*'s pick-up-and-play instant appeal, but it's a good bet that of the two this will be the one you'll still be loading up in a year's time.

☆☆☆☆

the blitter end

It's a bit of a slim month for the Blitter. The whole industry more or less disappeared over the last few weeks, as everyone was at the Winter CES in Las Vegas. Needless to say, Blitter will be providing you with the full lowdown on the gossip from the City that Never Sleeps next month. In the meantime, you'll just have to make do with whatever else we can forage from the industry's dustbin.

☆

Blitter is pleased to see that computer games are at last getting the nationwide recognition they deserve, thanks to Channel 4 and its excellent new show Gamesmaster. Blitter is sure that the programme's success is due, at least in part, to two key members of the ACE editorial team playing a crucial (and uncredited) role in the programme's conception. Now that it's on our screens, we would like to congratulate our pals on sister mag C+VG, who have done a sterling job of raising the tone of the programme. Unfortunately, not everyone appreciates their contribution - least of all controversial Sun columnist Garry Bushell, who in his review of the show referred to Frank, Jaz, Rad and the rest of the crew as "spotty herberts". Actually, now you come to mention it...

☆

Talking of the telly, Blitter is starting to become slightly worried about the rate at which Nintendo seems to be taking over the planet. Don't get us wrong, we like a bit of Mario as much of the next man, but when the games start taking over our favourite soap operas, things are obviously getting a bit much. Fans of EastEnders will have noticed that chirpy fruit-and-veg stallholder Pete Beale got hooked on Tetris on the GameBoy over Christmas - while playing, he had the music turned up so loud that it was difficult to hear the dialogue! (Actually, the music may be infuriating but Blitter would rather listen to that than Pauline going on and on at poor old Arthur any day of the week). A far more impressive gamesplaying feat than this, however, was to be found over on Channel 4, down in Brookside Close. There, the Dixons were also having a Nintendo-packed Christmas, with a brand new NES providing the entertainment. The only thing that we found difficult to understand was how Ron Dixon managed to get such impressive scores on Rush'n'Attack when he was holding the joypad with only one hand! Now that's what Blitter calls a Gamesmaster!

☆

Oblivious to everybody but the most attentive, Gremlin has launched a subliminal campaign against software piracy. Informed sources have recently disclosed that the title theme to that smart racing game Lotus 2 features speech that is barely audible to the human ear. Crank up the volume and listen closely, and you should here someone discreetly whispering "don't copy software" over and over. Whether or not this actually has a subconscious effect on those who listen to it remains a mystery, but it has to be said that in these days of rife disk bootlegging, anything's worth a shot. Just as long as the software houses don't start abusing it and have samples like "Go out and buy all our other games" or "send us all your money" burrowing their way into the minds of the nation.

☆

After the phenomenal response to last month's feature-ette on software lookalikes, we're continuing the series this month with some more separated-at-birth favourites. Just to show we're not biased, we're kicking off with our very own David Upchurch, who bears a striking resemblance to Andrew Strong out of The Commitments. Staying with the showbusiness angle, many people phoned in to comment on how much Ocean's Gary Bracey looks like Jeffery Holland, alias Spike out of Hi-De-Hi. Moving on into the world of politics, we believe that Grandslam boss Stephen Hall and fun-loving MP Sir Cyril Smith may be long-lost twins, while Psygnosis top boy Jonathan Ellis is an absolute dead ringer for Prime Minister John Major. Oh, and in reply to our call last month, a certain noted industry official called to suggest that Domark's Martin Defries could well take over as TV's Mister Bean, should Rowan Atkinson ever chuck in the towel..

☆

Over the last week or so, Blitter has become totally addicted to that super little Amiga game Bomber Man. This has led us here at ACE to realise just how neglected games like this have become over the years. Sophisticated software is all very well, but it comes to something when the majority of our free time is spent playing not commercial software, but PD arcade games. So come on software houses, let's get back to good old-fashioned values, eh? Simplicity = playability = fun. OK?

☆

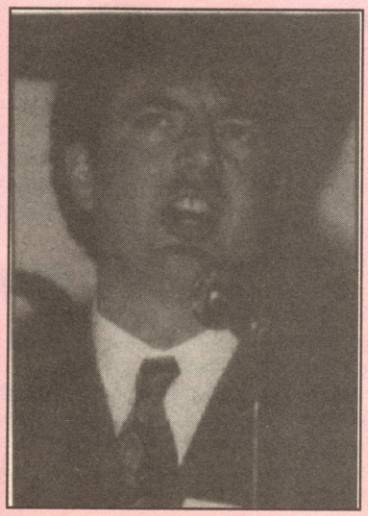
Phew! Tell you what, it's not easy coming up with enough interesting industry facts to fill the Blitter up each month. That's why we're asking YOU to come forward with any sleazy software stories you may have heard. Why not give us a call and spill your guts. After all, there's nothing worse than a guilty conscience, is there? You don't have to give your name and you may win a Blitter Action Trust award.

● Blit Blit!

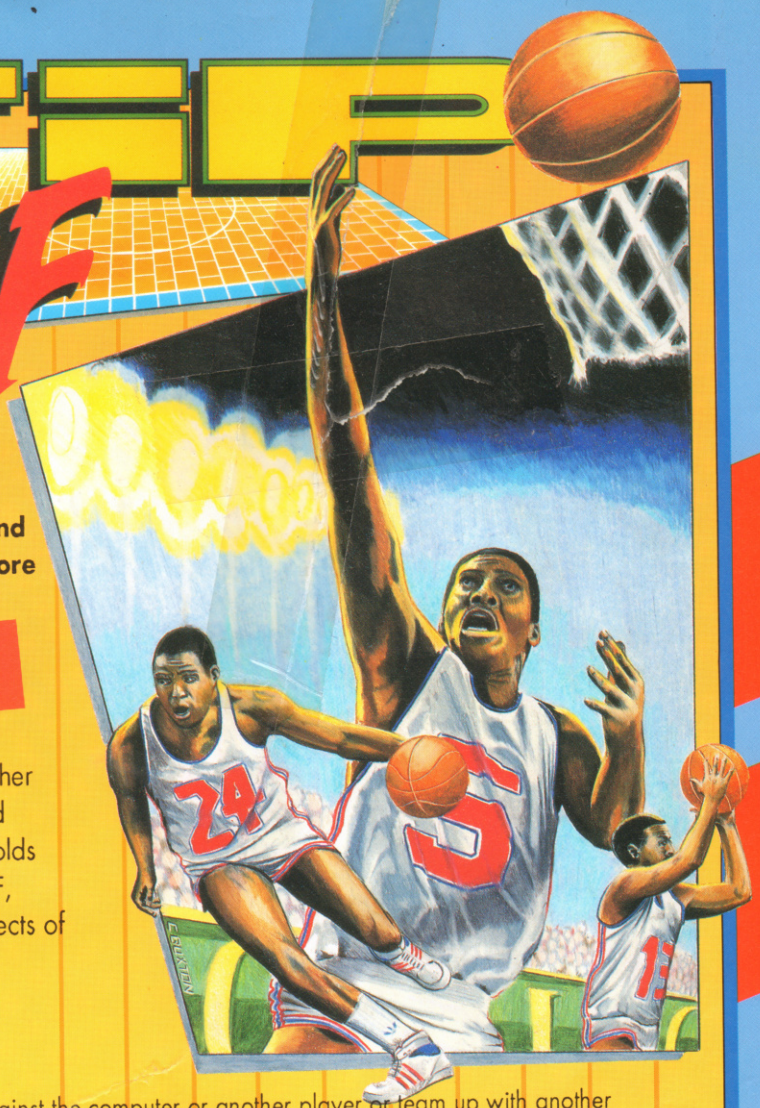
ACE PICTURE POWER!

Last month we promised you that we would be printing a little-seen picture of Future Publishing's Greg Ingham with his mouth closed, and we were indeed hoping to do this. Unfortunately, however, the claims of our Future mole who promised to get it for us were a little extravagant and in the end the picture just turned out to be yet another one of him with his mouth wide open. This comes as a particular disappointment to the Blitter, as such a picture would have been one to rival anything Arthur C Clarke could ever come up with. The more things like this happen, the more Blitter is willing to believe the rumours that this strange phenomenon is due to the fact that, after being cursed by a gypsy years ago, Greg's head will fall off if he ever stops talking. Still, famed for his ability to turn disaster into success, Greg has made the most out of his condition and can currently be seen on billboards across the nation advertising Dequacaine and on TV doing the Reach toothbrush ads.

NEXT MONTH we prove that someone to do with a hit football game is no shrimp in the trouser department.



TIP OFF



The sheer pace of the game, end to end action and tactical game play is the core of TIP OFF, a basketball simulation -

A SIMULATION WHICH IS GREAT FUN TO PLAY

Players' skills, attributes and fitness together with the astute substitution of players and change of tactics banks by the coach, holds the key to success in basket ball. TIP OFF, therefore includes some managerial aspects of the game. The main features are:-

* Multi directional scrolling screen
* Five skill levels. Skill level of both teams can be set independently.
* 1 to 4 players option. Option to play against the computer or another player or team up with another player against the computer or another player or two players.
* Facility to practice skills and tactics.
* Facility to create a team at all skill levels and design tactics.
* Instinctive Joystick controls to dribble, pass, shoot or do a dummy. There are two running speeds, two types of dribbling and passing and five types of shots at the basket (Jump shot, Hook shot, Skyhook, Running Jump shot and Slam Dunk).
* Each player on the court is an individual with a unique mixture of attributes (Age, Height, Flair, Pace, Stamina and Composure) and skills (Passing, Dribbling, Stealing, Shooting and Jumping).
* Two types of Leagues. Action Replay at 3 speeds.
* Extra moves are available using two independent button joysticks using the EXORLENCE System.

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